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Blogging Eurovision:
An Unconventional Online Space
for Everyday Political Talk

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Abstract

The paper starts by providing the overview of the Eurovision Song Contest, its participant countries and the audience. The aim of the research is to find out how everyday political talk takes place on non-political platforms. For this study, a blog dedicated to the Eurovision Song Contest was chosen. The research is netnographic, and the conclusions are drawn based on content analysis (the comments left on the Eurovision news blog - Wiwibloggs.com) and interviews with the journalists of the blog. The paper approaches the blog as a non-institutionalized space, also known as "the third space." It covers issues such as nation branding, communication in an anonymous setting and deliberative democracy. The paper further analyses different characteristics of the content shared on the blog and answers a question on whether such content is agonistic or antagonistic by nature.

Keywords:

Everyday political talk, Eurovision, blogging, third space, nation branding, deliberative democracy, agonism, antagonism.

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Preface

I would like to dedicate this master's thesis to all the young people who hail from developing or underdeveloped countries and are eager to gain an education. Coming from Georgia, I was fortunate to have access to higher education although my desire had always been to broaden my horizons and deepen my knowledge.

My aspirations have led me to an incredible journey which has included living in small and large countries, in warmer and colder climates with people of different cultures and languages, studying various and often unrelated fields. During this period I realised that hard work, patience and self-belief were crucial for my constant personal development. This enabled me to attain certain positions from which I have then been able to offer a helping hand to other young people. My goal is to stay committed to this cause by the continuous promotion of education and sharing my knowledge and experience with other hopefuls.

For my personal and professional development, I would like to thank the International Education Center and all the people working there. Without their scholarship, my studies at Uppsala University would not be possible.

I would like to thank my family, especially my mother and my grandmother, who played a prominent role in my life when I was taking the first steps on my journey towards higher education, and who never doubted me. I am forever grateful for the time, energy and effort they invested in me, and although it is not possible to fully pay it back, I will keep trying my best.

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1. Introduction

Politics have not only affected the increasing number of participant countries at the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) but modern political issues may often influence the results of the competition as well. Thus, it has long been speculated that talent alone is not enough to win the song contest. When it comes to research on Europe's largest music contest, it can be summarized that a significant number of articles have been written on voting patterns and bloc voting, which include but are not limited to Charron (2013), Hennig et.al (2013), Ulbricht et.al (2015), Ginsburgh and Noury (2008). Some participant countries have different political ideologies, some were part of the same union in the past, and some share a common language or culture, all of which is reflected in the ESC voting. "This musical event embraces issues of cultural, linguistic and political identity" Le Guern & Lemish, 2000 (as cited in Lemish, 2004, p.42) It seems that the contest is sometimes dubbed as a mirror of Europe's past and current issues. These sentiments are not only reflected in how the audience casts their votes, which has been the focus of many scholars, but also how the viewers express their opinions online on blogs, websites, and social media accounts. The online activity of devoted Eurovision fans is precisely what I have focused on. Considering that Eurovision blogs have not been widely studied academically, this gives me an advantage to fill the existing gap.

There has not been much work done on this topic by other Master's students. As of today, only one Uppsala University student has written a Master's thesis on Eurovision and the lack of academic work can be illustrated by his quote "The thesis that lies before you has been much contested. Whenever I was discussing my thesis with people in other fields than Cultural Studies, I felt I was trying to defend a topic which in the eyes of many was insignificant, silly even" (Meijer, 2013)

My motivation in studying the ESC derives from its complexity — it is widespread around the continent and there is a notable size of fanbase, especially in cyberspace. The official website of the contest states that there are 2 million active Eurovision fans online. I am personally interested in this topic because I enjoy watching the contest. I found out about the contest in 2007 when my country of origin, Georgia, debuted. I started actively watching the contest during my exchange studies in Malmö, where the competition was hosted in 2013. Since then I have twice had backstage access, which enabled me to gain firsthand experiences of 'Eurovision culture'.

The popularity of the ESC means some professional and amateur journalists commit to writing about the song contest year after year, some even working as full-time ESC reporters. There are dozens of fan-run blogs dedicated to the competition. Some of the blogs have massive audiences. One such blog is Wiwibloggs.com - the most read independent Eurovision blog, with 3.14 million readers in 2016. (According to the statistics provided by the blog.) Others include ESCtoday, EscXtra, ESC Bubble, ESCdaily, etc.

The theoretical framework of this study is created through different concepts as a basis for empirical analysis. First, the concepts of cultural participation and political participation are discussed. The study looks at cultural participation in non-institutionalized online communities and how such participation can facilitate political participation. Secondly, the concept of third space is explained as online spaces that are not intended to discuss politics but in which everyday political talk takes place as cultural participation. The next concept is everyday political talk that is not intentionally directed towards state politicians, political parties or parliaments but rather as political talk that occurs among everyday conversations of ordinary citizens. The last but not the least, concepts of antagonism and agonism are discussed. Antagonism is approached from the perspective of Carl Schmitt who underlines that friend-enemy grouping in political distinction. The concept of agonism is approached from the perspective of Chantal Mouffe who advocates for the possibility of political action that is adversarial rather than based on enmity as Schmitt suggests.

As many scholars suggest, the internet and social media platforms have become a part of and enmeshed in our everyday lives. Now it is possible to observe that online and offline spaces can come together in various and fluid manners to create mutual meanings and co-exist. Additionally, online interactions and spaces can not be seen inferior to their offline counterparts because of their pervasiveness in our lives. Thus, online and offline spaces are entities that complement and augment each other (Hallet & Barber 2014, p. 310-311). Since digital spaces and technologies are infused in various aspects of our lives, the line between online and offline has become blurred and vague in a way that we cannot simply argue a clear-cut distinction between them anymore. According to Hampton et.al. (2016), it is possible to foresee that online interactions "have implications for conversations" that occur offline (p.1091). In line with this, it is argued by scholars that offline and online interactions and behaviours are "intrinsically linked" and need to be taken into consideration together (Beneito-Montagut 2011, p. 717). It is commonly argued that Eurovision as a cultural contest has always had inherently a political dimension (Wolther 2012, p. 168). A common agreement among the scholars who have written about the Eurovision voting is that it often is political. "It is therefore reasonable to suspect that … countries cast political rather than "artistic" votes, even though there is no political issue at stake" (Ginsburgh &, Noury 2008). Keeping all these thoughts in mind, it is possible to think that certain features of Eurovision Song Contest as an offline event would be intrinsically reflected upon Wiwibloggs.com as an online space that is concerned with the contest. This political aspect has been the primary reason why I decided to study this contest, with a difference that instead of studying the voting patterns I chose to focus on the comments shared on the Eurovision blog. I was a reader of Wiwibloggs.com for over one year and I had noticed that occasionally political debates would spark and users would engage in conversations, leaving comments with atypical characteristics for a music blog. To research this phenomenon deeper my primary research questions are:

- *Are political discussions indeed taking place on the blog?*
- *How does political talk occur on Wiwibloggs.com as a non-conventional political communicative space?*

Thus my main aim is to find out if the political discussions are taking place on the blog, and if so, demonstrate it by examples. Working to answer my second main question will allow an in-depth theoretical and empirical analysis of everyday political talk in third spaces which is a neglected area in academic studies on political communication.

Overall, the research questions of the thesis are oriented towards understanding how political talk "pops up" in cultural public spheres and how political talk is intertwined with popular culture. Additionally, the thesis tries to understand how cultural participation can turn into political participation in the form of everyday communication in spaces featuring characteristics that facilitate political discussions.

Furthermore, after the initial investigation of the main research questions stated above, the thesis intends to understand the concepts of everyday political talk, political participation and how this can be observed on Wiwibloggs.com aiming to answer the following secondary questions;

- *Are political events, which take place offline, affecting the discussions online?*
- *What is the nature of the comments when it comes to the attitudes expressed by the users, are they agonistic or antagonistic?*

This has been the motivation for me to study the everyday political talk on a non-political online discussion space and prove that — though it may seem irrational and insignificant at times — it is a process which, in the long term, contributes to improvement of democracy levels around Europe. This aim of the research is achieved by doing the content analysis and further supporting the subject by conducting the interviews with the bloggers.

2. Background

The origins of the most popular televised music festival in Europe date back to the middle of the last century, more precisely to 1956. That year the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) announced the first Eurovision Song Contest. In its first year it was primarily broadcast on radio, but was also televised. The original participants included various Western European countries, a territory seriously fractured after the Second World War.

Three years later, the first academic article referring to Eurovision emerged. In "A study in international communication: Eurovision" Pollock and Woods (1959) analyzed the broadcasting, structure and impact of the contest, which they define as "the first attempt to broadcast programs simultaneously in countries with different television standards" (p.101). According to both authors the exchange of content between nations had occurred from the early years of television but until the arrival of Eurovision it had been limited to "films, cinematography and temporary connections".

During the coming years Eurovision is mentioned in magazines and newspapers but it is not until the '90s that scientific articles emerge focusing solely on the festival. The founder of - what some academics call - Eurovision Studies was Yair Gad (1995) with "Unite Unite Europe' The political and cultural Structures of Europe as reflected in the Eurovision Song Contest.' In the paper the professor of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the University of Jerusalem develops the theory of bloc voting based on a statistical study. This theory has since been expanded and updated as the festival has changed its format. However, academics who have studied the contest consider Gad's article as one of the main texts to begin with in any Eurovision study.

It may be paradoxical that the first article related to the festival, an entertainment program broadcast on TV, comes from pure statistics and mathematics. However, if anything

characterizes Eurovision Studies is its interdisciplinarity. It is a diverse subject that has allowed researchers to study the contest from musical, historical and political sides. Moreover, there even is a course that is regularly held at the University of Vienna on the History of Europe in the 20th century via the Eurovision Song Contest.

In 2017 the number of active participants stands at 42. The song contest is the world's largest international annual music competition which is traditionally broadcast in almost every European country and often outside the continent as well. For example, Australia has been broadcasting the show for over 30 years. (Acott, 2013)

Each participant country is represented by a single act. The winner of the competition is revealed in the end and expert juries from each country and the home viewers share equal responsibility (50-50%) in determining the best act of the year. "Eurovision is often described as musical "kitsch" and a shallow, valueless show of glamour" (Le Guern & Lemish 2000, p.43).

According to Fenn (2006) The talk about the politicization of the contest and its connection with the EU does not fade away. "Irrespective of whether it contributes anything to the advancement of music per se, the Eurovision Song Contest does provide a remarkable and unique example of an annual exchange of 'goods' and opinions between countries."... "the concept of the Eurovision Song Contest as a whole should be used as a role-model for determining the overall composition of the European Union."

Over time the contest has grown significantly, due to the increasing popularity of the project as well as a result of political changes in Europe, such as the split-up of Czechoslovakia and the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The number of participating countries has risen and the discussion over who can participate and how far the borders of Europe stretch has become the hottest debate around the contest. Participatory rights are granted not only to states geographically located on European soil, but also to European Broadcasting Union members. "Any country within a broadly defined "European Broadcasting Area" (as well as a few outside)

has the right to join the European Broadcasting Union and to compete in Eurovision, a situation that allows countries such as Iceland, Malta, Turkey, Israel, Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia to vie for the title of Europe's best pop performance alongside France, Germany, England, and Spain" (Eurovision.tv quoted by Cassiday, 2014, p.1). Interestingly the countries outside of the European Broadcasting Area too can have a chance to participate in Eurovision. Australia, which is an associate member of the European Broadcasting Union was invited to compete at the contest's 60th anniversary with the slogan "building bridges." Since their debut Australia has been invited every year and by 2017 has competed three times in total. (Jordan, Eurovision.tv, 2015)

For every country, participation in the song contest has a different value and meaning. The number of participants has almost doubled since the fall of the Berlin Wall when former Eastern bloc countries joined. It has been argued that for these countries Eurovision became a platform to showcase that they too are modern, independent European nations. It could be this desire which led to the victories of these "New European" nations, namely Estonia in 2001, Latvia - 2002, Turkey - 2003, Ukraine 2004, Serbia 2007, Russia 2008, Azerbaijan - 2011 and Ukraine again in 2016. "They started to realize they can use the contest as a platform to reclaim their European heritage, and show themselves in the best possible light" says Dr Milija Gluhovic, co-director of the Eurovision Research Network. (Hume, CNN, 2012)

For transcontinental countries situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia Eurovision participation can be an identity-shaping phenomenon. Georgia – a country in the Caucasus region - has been a member of the Eurovision family since 2007. A majority of the population in Georgia identify themselves as European and when the subject is discussed, they usually refer to historical and cultural contexts to prove their ties with the continent. Current foreign policy too seems obvious, with the Prime Minister of the country tweeting "#Georgia is returning to the European family." (@KvirikashviliGi, Twitter.com, 2017) Being forced to be part of the Soviet Union took the country off the map for almost a century and thus it can be assumed that Georgia uses the ESC stage to regain recognition as a European country. A country which has been

actively seeking EU and NATO membership can see the ESC as a step towards full membership in the European family. (NDI Poll, 2016)

Similarly, another country which is not situated on the geographic landmass of Europe but has close ties with the continent's culture is Israel. "The country joined Eurovision in 1973 and inclusion within the contest was perceived as a source of national pride, according Israel legitimacy as a "European" country: Western developed and respected" (Lemish 2004, P. 42).

Yet another transcontinental country is Turkey, consisting of a small European part, with its main territory situated in Asia Minor. Turkey also saw the victory at the ESC as a confirmation of their affiliation and close ties with Europe. As stated by Akin (2013 p.2304) "Before 2003, when Turkey won the ESC for the first time, national media discourses in that country had traditionally framed the ESC, in large part, as a national struggle to be won against the Europeans, thus confirming Turkey's European credentials at last."

Furthermore, achieving success in the ESC has been "an issue of cultural pride for larger portions of the Turkish population" (Christiansen and Christiansen, 2008, p. 159)."

3. Literature Review

The previous research conducted on the Eurovision Song Contest revolves around certain themes. As Wolther (2012) emphasizes, even though Eurovision is a "major media event" and has been featured in "countless articles in magazines and newspapers" the scholarly work on the contest is not "in-depth", not numerous, and their major focus is in "fandom or voting" (165). In this literature review, I outline the previous research which is on Eurovision in relation to Media and Communication Studies.

3.1. Nation Branding through Eurovision as a Popular Media Event

In a globalized world an important element to ensure a sovereign and stable nation, having a feasible economic system, as well as establishing authority and validity of a state, strongly depends on developing international networks and engaging "inward investment"(Jordan 2014, p.22). In this perspective, efforts of nation branding and popular media events like the Eurovision Song Contest have a significant role in negotiating positions "on the world stage", especially for the nations that have recently gained their sovereignty. Although nation branding can look benevolent at first glance, it manifests itself as a way of selling a nation state and "commodification of national identity", mainly carried out by important media events to attract and convey messages to a wider audience (Ibid.). Throughout its history, Eurovision Song Contest has evolved into more than a musical contest because of its power to "move and polarise audiences" in a manner that has only been achieved by international sports events (Wolther 2012, p.166). In this case, the contest proves itself to be a very fertile cultural attraction to undertake exercises of nation branding. According to Dinnie (2008), nation branding is mostly utilized as a way of promoting " tourism, foreign investment and boost exports" (cited in Jordan 2014, p.22). It is used to communicate "a nation's policies and culture to an international audience" for the purposes of making the country more attractive to foreigners. The underlying logic of nation branding suggests that nations can be seen as brands, therefore, they can be

"strategically marketed" to generate interest in others to invest in their countries and advance the countries' image. Therefore, how a nation is represented in a booming media event such as the ESC is essential for its economic and political gain. Such representations built up for the audience of the ESC can even ensure a nation's "international credibility, increase currency stability and therefore investor confidence". Paving the way for the fortification of nation building (Ibid., p.22-23). Jordan (2014) reminds us that nation branding is the exercise of "soft power" (p.23). While exercising the powers of military action or "economic sanctions" manifest the use of hard power, soft power is directly related to a nation's attitude and influence towards others as a "cultural persuasion" (Nye, 2003, p. 545 cited in Ibid., p.23). Jordan (2012) argues that nation branding illustrates the aspiration and eagerness of countries to attract attention to them, their accomplishments and their represented qualities. When considered as a practice, nation building aims to govern the "image and reputation" of a certain country and assist "consumers, namely the wider public", to extricate between and "identify within countries". The way nation branding operates is the same with conventional modes of public relations which seek to influence the international public, "investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders" to cultivate a critical understanding of a nation state (p.23).

Dayan and Katz (1992) argue that popular media events are "high holidays of mass communication" and can be defined on three different levels; 'syntactic', 'semantic' and 'pragmatic'. Events like the ESC are considered 'syntactic' because they interrupt the ordinary everyday life and dominate the media when the event is taking place. They are also 'semantic' due to their representation of "an occasion or a historic ceremony with reverence". Lastly, Dayan and Katz underline that ESC can be seen as a media event on 'a pragmatic level' since it attracts wide scope of audiences "who view them in a festive style" (cited in Ibid., p.27). Recent studies have been conducted on nation branding and the ESC by scholars such as Baker (2006) who has examined the nationalist elements of Croatian entries and Pajala (2013) who discussed the ESC in relation to "Finland's geopolitical position in Europe" (Ibid., p. 27). Although it is contested that the ESC actually might not be contributing to music environment as much, Jordan (2014) argues that it caters an exceptional and exclusive instance of a yearly "exchange of goods and

opinions between countries" (p.27). In line with ideas presented above, Bolin (2006) states that with time, the ESC has evolved into a discursive mechanism for representing and shaping 'Europeanness' and political game plans of 'Europeanisation'. He furthermore argues that just like "the World's Fairs of the 19th Century", the ESC can be seen as an exhibit that showcases the cultural and identity-related elements of nations (cited in Ibid., p.27).

3.2. The ESC as Transnational Popular Communication

Altuğ Akın (2013) argues that the ESC can be investigated through an understanding of transnational popular communication because of its communicative characteristics as a "televisual product" which has communicative means that expand to international spaces (p.2304-2305). Akın (2013) states that the ESC occupies fundamental characteristics of "television narration, such as succession, repetition, and series forms". For example, the ESC presents "performances, interval acts and vote collection… as a succession" (p.2305). All of these pieces display "internal narratives" and comprise Eurovision Song Contest as an entity. Additionally, how the ESC "deploys" repetition can be seen in two different categories; short term and long term. In short term repetitions, voting processes and musical performances are approximately seen as similar parts "with different actors and actions". In the long term, repetitions are seen as the same configuration of the contest which is recited each year. Therefore, ESC can be identified as an annually televised program that features almost relatively "same format, plot, and added characters". Additionally, with its repetitive and annual nature, the imagined community of ESC is bolstered (Ibid.).

Additionally, Akın (2013) emphasizes that besides manifesting fundamental qualities of two television program types; "variety show and media event", the ESC is formulated as a televised product for the purposes of attracting as many viewers as possible (p.2305). Furthermore, Dayan & Katz (1992) underline that the ESC offers viewers "a rule-governed battle" which conveys the message of "who will win this year?" (quoted in Ibid., p. 2305-2306). According to Akın (2013) these previously mentioned features are merged with specific transitory and spatial

characteristics. He states that the dominant transitory characteristic that the ESC manifests is "simultaneity" that administers the function of community formation in relation to *ESC,* amidst its audiences that are from variety of geographical locations. Furthermore, ESC's feature of "liveness" is augmented with the emphasis on its spatial range through coordinated collection of votes from different countries and cities. A spatial feature of ESC is global distribution which describes the idea that "the show's center is simultaneously in coordination and in touch with numerous centers and capitals". In this perspective, the ESC's overall impression of closeness and liveness enhances as the contest shifts its focus "from one country to the next in real time", specifically when voting takes place. Therefore, with all of its textual and genre features, Eurovision Song Contest has grown into "symbolic form" which is based on representation and competent at generating numerous and various 'imaginations' and at facilitating "imagined communities of audiences", both on global and domestic levels (Ibid.).

According to Akın (2013), ESC has gained viewers and accumulated its social essence primarily as a televised event. Just like it can be seen in "any other symbolic form or cultural product", it came into being and prevailed until today because of its various aspects and "dynamics such as agents and organizations". When the focus is shifted from the product to the production of the ESC, similar to other media products, its fundamental features of communicative essence must be taken into account (Ibid., p.2306). Thompson (2010) states that when Bourdieu's perspective is employed to the ESC and its production sphere, the contest can be identified as a 'cultural product' maintained by a "subfield" of international media field which acts as "a structured space of positions which are occupied by agents or organizations oriented to the same prizes or values inherent in this field" (quoted in Ibid.). In this perspective, the concept of 'international media field' signifies what Bourdieu calls as 'global media field' which has to be considered for the cultural production and the product to be investigated holistically (quoted in Ibid., p.2306-2307). Additionally, the "subfield" in this context signifies a specifically organized "space of positions" that surfaced around Eurovision Song Contest. Therefore, based on this conceptualization, Akın (2013) states that among the agents that contend for "the prestige of producing the best show" primarily come the broadcasting organizations. Therefore, broadcasters mainly devote

themselves to host the best show as well as winning the competition to gain symbolic capital in both the subfield of ESC and the international media field each year (Ibid.).

Another approach to ESC as a communicative space is employed by Christensen and Christensen (2008) through the conception of public sphere by Habermas. Christensen and Christensen (2008) argue that ESC stimulates an intricate communicative space of Europe: "a supranational *and* national display and exchange arena" in which communication is established through 'communicative mediations of culture' with its millions of viewers in 40 countries. They also argue that ESC as a communicative space nurtures various "social and cultural images, ideas and beliefs" belonging to both parts and the whole of Europe (p. 157). According to them, ESC is the embodiment of a European communicative space in three forms; 1) the televised contest itself and the acts in it are "representational" in cultural and political ways; 2) publics engage in participation by televoting; 3) the contests acts as a "mediated" and "symbolic space" with its coverage in media and commentaries both previous to the contest and afterwards (Ibid.). Christensen and Christensen (2008) emphasize that ESC has been a communicative space "since 1956" and it attained a more highlighted aspect "after the inclusion of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) in the 1990s". The contest's communicative nature on "at national level" establishes social communication by representing national characteristics and values through performance to Europe by the materialization of " the politico-cultural" connotations of the performance that is selected and its ultimate rating in ESC (p.157). Christensen & Christensen (2008) furthermore add that ESC's establishment of an emerging "international media discourse"- or an international media field as previously suggested - mainly appears as "critical/affirmative reaction to national cultural representations". The creation of such discourses or fields are enmeshed in social and political life regarding national identity, communication as well as 'symbolic' and 'economic' capital, paving the way to an idea of "Europeanness" in ESC which acts as a communicative space in which "cultural representation is reacted to in both political and socio-cultural terms" (p.157).

3.3. Everyday Political Talk and Deliberative Democracy

This section aims to outline the previous research on everyday political talk, therefore, this section does not give an in-depth understanding of what everyday political talk is. Thus, it must be emphasized that the discussion on what is meant by political talk and what is identified as such, is reflected in the theoretical framework to inform the empirical analysis rather than here. In academia, the issue of everyday political talk has been mainly investigated in line with deliberative democracy. Additionally, the concept of everyday political talk is still somehow neglected compared to other form of political communication in relation to its investigation in non-political online spaces. However, the number of scholars who are engaged with studies of everyday political talk that occurs in such spaces unintentionally, began to increase in the last few years.

In past years, there has been an interest in deliberation and its role in democracy. Kim & Kim (2008) argue that many scholars have decidedly aimed attention deliberation can be utilized, speculating that the ultimate aim of democracy is to generate "legitimate and efficient political decisions" (p.52). In this perspective, Elster (1998) states that deliberation is essentially about the influential assumptions and "induced preferences'' of individuals in relation to decision-making. Furthermore he argues that deliberation is the most suitable form of collective decision making regarding these assumptions and preferences (cited in Kim & Kim 2008, p.52). Similarly, Gambetta (1998) identifies deliberation as a form of communication that takes place previous to "making a collective decision" which is positioned "between bargaining and arguing" (quoted in Kim & Kim 2008, p.52). Just like other scholars, Schudson (1997) identifies public deliberation as "problem-solving talk'' that serves the purposes of conflict resolution, collective decision-making and protection of an individual's own interests (quoted in Kim & Kim 2008, p.52

Kim & Kim (2008) argue that most of the scholars have identified deliberative democracy as a decision-making mechanism induced by 'public deliberation'. Not agreeing with this idea, they

emphasize that deliberation is a lot more than 'a decision-making process'. According to them, deliberation in a democracy is not only a device for using public reasoning and 'making collective decisions' but also a mechanism of producing public reasoning and arriving at shared understandings (p.51). Dahlgren (2005) states that most of the theories of democracy have presupposed that "the communicative interaction" among individuals holds the prime importance for democracy. In this perspective, discussions among individuals are seen as "constitutive of publics" that are both deemed morally and practically essential for democracy to thrive. The concept of deliberative in this case consolidates elements from political theory with certain aspects of communicative action. This approach is specifically used and shaped by Habermas and the scholars who engage in the investigation of his theoretical tradition of deliberative democracy and communication (p.155-156). Dahlgren (2005) states that deliberation indicates the process of "open discussion" that is aimed at attaining "rationally motivated consensus" (p.155-156). Graham (2008) states that unlike Habermas, scholars such as "Barber (1984), Benhabib (1996), Dryzek (2000), and Mansbridge (1999)" have shifted the focus of deliberative model to place citizens at the core of deliberative theory rather than focusing too much attention to only public spheres. From this perspective of deliberation, public spheres in which everyday political talk occurs acts as the fundamental space for deliberation as a field of democratization. In this vein, it is possible to argue that citizens' participation in everyday political talk make them "aware and informed". Thus, such communication enables them to understand each other, examine all kinds of ideas as well as articulating, cultivating and altering their preferences (p.19). It is Graham's (2008) contention that all these possibilities are crucial for "a healthy, effective, and active public opinion" and of course for the public sphere itself. He also emphasizes that it is important to identify what is meant by everyday political talk, if we were to shift focus to everyday communication rather than focusing on institutionalized forms of political talk and deliberative processes. Since the traditional notion of deliberation privileges "reason by argumentation" as the main form of communication for democracy, it oversees the "realities of everyday conversation". Therefore, a revised understanding of deliberation becomes essential (Ibid.).

Kim & Kim (2008) reminds us that it is everyday political talk that enables citizens to comprehend what "their own interests are, what others want, and what fits the common good". Without these, it would not be possible for individuals to participate influential forms of deliberation as an instrument for making reasonable decisions. Briefly, everyday political talk, which is in is nature dialogic and deliberative, is imperative for "purposive and rational deliberations". Habermas' theory of communicative action argues that everyday political talk might seem "trivial an irrational", however, is the central ground to forms reasonable modes of deliberation (p.54).

In line with the new technological advances, deliberation research was also affected and a shift towards new public spheres-such as third spaces- and everyday political talk began. Graham and Wright (2014) argue that the scholarly work about online forms of deliberation has advanced in diverse directions (p.81). However, most of the work that has been done on everyday political talk in online spheres have been approached by a deliberative model of communication and democracy. In recent literature on deliberation and online public spheres, Astrom and Gronlund (2012), Beierle (2004), Coleman (2004), Fishkin (2009) and Kies (2010) have investigated how people make use of online consultations. Brundidge (2010), Stromer-Galley (2003), Sunstein (2002), Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009), have studied online spaces in relation to their facilitation of communication among individuals who hold opposing views. Additionally, Wojcieszak et al. (2009) and Baek et al. (2012) have conducted research comparing offline and online forms of deliberation (Graham & Wright 2014, 200-201).

Although not many in number, there have been similar research to this study and its investigation of everyday political talk in third spaces from a perspective that does not privilege rational and deliberative communicative forms. Scullion et al. (2010) investigated everyday political talk in "non-political forums such as Hotukdeals and Digitalspy" (Wright 2012, p.7). Other examples are Graham's (2009) research on the "discussions on docu-soap fan-pages", Svensson's (2010) research on "discussions on ice-hockey fanpages" , Campbell's (2007) research on "comments to

news stories on the affinity portal Gay.com", Andersson's (2013) research on "political discussions on an online community that primarily targets youth with a specific music preference and a specific clothing style" (Svensson 2015, p.285-286), Van Zoonen's (2007) research on everyday political talk that can be observed in online film discussion forums as well as the comment fields of Youtube videos (2010) (Wright 2012, p.7-8).

4.Theoretical Framework

4.1. Cultural and Political Participation

Valtysson (2010) emphasizes that there are two substantial features of Social Networking Sites and virtual spaces that are made possible by the establishment of Web 2.0.; 'interaction' and 'distribution' which are made feasible for general public. Many blogging platforms as well as social networking web-sites such as *"YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, Facebook"*- (emphasis included in original)- enabled the production of extensive amounts of information that are digitally cultural (200). According to Valtysson (2010), these extensive amounts of information gave way to expansion and rising of "cultural participation" and essentially transformed the essence of such participation, due to prominent engagement in interaction and rapid dissemination in Web 2.0. Unlike traditional media platforms, digital media technologies blurred the distinction between "production and consumption" and this blurring affected "concepts of cultural policy such as authorship, copyright, aesthetics, cultural governance and identity" (Ibid.).

In line with this thought, Dahlgren and Alvares (2013) point out the fact that the web has an essential attribute and a capacity to facilitate horizontal modes of communication between people and organizations as well as among themselves which can be used for the several purposes such as "sharing information… for providing mutual support, organising, mobilising, or solidifying collective identities". This exact capacity makes the web conceivably a robust "facilitator of civic culture" that can potentially enhance participation and engagement in online spheres (p.55). It is important to underline that new media technologies are ingrained in cultural and social lives of people both online and offline and they are fundamental elements in operation of certain "groups, organisations, and institutions". Due to these reasons, it is possible to say that digital technologies demonstrate excessive "sociological complexity" and lead to plenty of debates among scholars. There are mainly two sides of the debate on new technologies; optimistic and pessimistic (Ibid.). Some scholars like Sunstein (2008) argue that these technologies enabled the

formation and production of "new" and "better forms of knowledge" through cumulative "wisdom of the many" that can be observed in collaborative websites such as Wikipedia. On the pessimistic side of the discussion, scholars like Keen (2008) argue that Web 2.0. should be deemed as dangerous because of its so-called erosion of the "values, standards, and creativity" that exist in the society as well as its undermining attitude towards "cultural institutions". Another set of pessimists like Carr (2008) go further to argue that the Web's rationale is corrupting human beings' capability "to think, read, and remember, with dangerous long-term consequences" (Sunstein 2008; Keen 2008; Carr 2008 as cited in Ibid.). Of course, it is understandable to see such divisions among scholars based on different perspectives and approaches to digital media technologies and such discussions will continue as we face new technological possibilities day by day.

Similarly, the approach to the possibility of digital media technologies to act as facilitators of "civic culture" that hold the possibility enhance political engagement and participation as mentioned previously has been divided among scholars. The discussions once again revolve around scholars who are either optimistic, for example Benkler 2006; Castells 2010 or pessimistic such as Mozorov 2011; Goldberg 2010; Hindman 2009; Song 2009 when facing the issue (cited in Ibid.). However there are also scholars who remain skeptical and point out the the web might be imitating "as a democratic technology" (Ibid.). At this point, it is ideal to underline that it is not the new digital media technologies that establish social change, participation or engagement, because as Glaveanu (2010) argues, "participation doesn't come naturally", there should be at least some kind of human effort or the "society as a whole" for cultural participation to take place online or offline (p.62). Therefore, we must see these new technologies as facilitators of participation rather than determinants of it. According to Dahlgren and Alvares (2013), the web's usage for political ends ranks quite low among the activities that are carried out with digital media technologies, even ranking lower than not only "consumption, entertainment, social connections" but also "pornography". Additionally people are drawn to "like-minded discursive 'cocoons' or 'echo chambers' on the web" which potentially prevents them from being confronted with ideas and perspectives that are different than theirs and keeps

them from developing "the capacity for genuine argument". In this perspective, there is a tendency to perceive individuals as 'consumers' rather than 'citizens' when they make use of online resources and political participation is somehow always deemed as "the underdog in the competition" in relation to people's engagement in online spheres. However, all these points do not mean that web 2.0. is not changing "the contingencies of politics and the political". There are enough logical reasons to stay "encouraged" about the web's capacity to facilitate "democratic participation". It is proven by scholars that particularly digital media are very beneficial and convenient to advocate for civic caused and empowerment, as an augmented "sense of agency" that can utilize various "kinds of participatory activity: what we can call civic practices". Contemporary scholars have also unveiled the increasing fluidity between consumer and citizen identities facilitated by media cultures. From this perspective, public spheres in which cultural and political participation occur should not be seen as a "separate universe" from "popular culture". Instead they blend and nourish each other "in subtle ways". It can be observed that political meanings and discussions manifest themselves in popular culture and boost "the popular character of the political" that has the possibility to bolster democracy. To understand participation from a holistic perspective, it is essential to take popular culture and cultural public spheres as "potentially (affectively) relevant for mediated citizenship and as a port of entry into the political", specifically in online spheres which "overall participatory ethos is strongly developed" into consideration (p. 54-56).

According to Svensson (2015), online spaces that are "non-institutionalized" and are not mainly "directed towards decision-makers" enable political participation among individuals. To understand political participation in relation to "the organisation of society and our co-existence in it" from a broader perspective, he furthermore emphasizes that it is essential for us to also investigate the 'non-normative identities' in public spheres as important elements. He underlines that such an approach is beneficial to think critically "about our life situations, our society and our place in it" (p.283). When we talk about participation, it is important to discuss what we mean about it. Drawing from Carpentier's (2011) work, Svensson (2015) states that participation can be distinguished in two categories; 'narrow/minimalist' and 'wide/maximalist'. The narrow

participation can be exemplified as "casting a vote every fourth year" and wide participation can include all modes of action such as conveying opinions through blogging as well as engaging in civil disobedience (p. 285). Another point Svensson (2015) argues is that apart from 'wide' and 'narrow' definitions of it, participation also includes actions that aim to impact the whole society besides decision-makers. In this perspective, it is possible to say political participation can be "initiated from within representative democratic institutions and practices", or can be initiated from outside the parliament but directed towards "public decision-makers". Additionally, political participation can be initiated in cultural public spheres but not aimed at state-oriented politics or institutions (p.285). The last version of political participation, according to Svensson (2014; 2015) can be identified as 'cultural participation'.

Svensson (2015) argues that "discussions of cultural participation" are mainly rooted in Hermes' (2006) ideas on 'cultural citizenship' and 'cultural public sphere(s)' (p.285). From Hermes' perspective, citizenship can be performed in variety of places. In this aspect, Svensson (2015) argues that it is possible to see performances of citizenship in public spheres as places in which construction of public opinion can be observed (p.285). In light of formation of public opinions through individual communication in cultural public spheres, a potential for participation is uncovered. Since cultural public spheres are non-institutionalized and not primarily directed towards decision-makers as Svensson suggests, political talk that occurs in these spaces are not the same in nature with conversations that we observe in online spaces reserved for political purposes (Ibid). Based on his studies, Svensson (2015) argues that everyday political talk that occurs in online spaces of popular culture as public spheres is mainly initiated by the participants without the intention of starting a political discussion (Ibid.) and such political talk varies in different communicative contexts. Svensson (2015) emphasizes that everyday political talk or political 'communication as potential participation', is more likely to occur in contemporary societies that are connected and infused with online social networks "in which agency is complexly interwoven with the platforms" that individuals make use of and the communication that take place on these specific platforms. Keeping this infusion of technological structures, communication and different social contexts in mind, he furthermore argues that conversations

that take place online spaces are concerned with possibilities "for mediated participation in a (semi-)public debate as well as self-representation" (p.286).

4.2. Third Space

Based on Oldenburg's concept of 'third place', the concept of 'third space' has been developed in connection to new public spheres which feature everyday political talk and discussions online. To understand what third space is and how to determine if a certain online platform can be identified as a third space, first we must understand Oldenburg's conception of 'third place'. Oldenburg's concept tells us that third places are public spaces that go "beyond the home or workplace where people can meet and interact informally" (Wright 2012, p.8). In this sense, we must think of third places as place based locations, just like Habermas' concept of public spheres. An important aspect of third places is that they provide a specific location for its participants and can present the possibility for communities to flourish in these locations As Oldenburg (1999) suggests, a third place is a universal designation "for a great variety of public spaces" that accommodates assemblages of individuals from all walks of life and an important location for everyday public life (Ibid.). With their features that enable social life, community bonding and inclusion of everyday individuals, third places are considered to act as facilitators in "development of societies and communities" through its capacity to strengthen citizenship and therefore, are essential elements for "the political processes of a democracy" (Oldenburg 1999, quoted in Ibid.). In this aspect, Oldenburg (1999) exemplifies third places as spaces which can vary "from the traditional English pub to a Parisian cafe". At this point, we must note that not all public spaces can be considered as third places, to be characterized as one, they must demonstrate specific characteristics which are social and environmental in their nature (Ibid.)

Unfortunately, as Wright (2012) suggests there has not been many "empirical studies" in literature that have focused on if online forums can be considered as third places and the existent literature on this matter only directed attention to sociological aspects of online communities "rather than their role in political talk". In this perspective, Wright has detected an existent gap in

how a concept of the third place can be created in relation to online spheres and if digital media platforms actually assist or incapacitate political talk (p.9). According to Wright (2012), one of the "most sophisticated analysis of the theoretical concept of third places" in relation to new media technologies was provided by Soukup (2006) (Ibid.). When dealing with third places that are mediated through computers and the Web, Soukup (2006) suggests the use of 'virtual third place' as a term due to its acknowledgement of 'interaction' which is one of the most important features of online spaces (Ibid., p.10). He also argues that 'virtual third place "transcends space and time and alters identity and symbolic referents via simulation" (Soukup 2006 quoted in Ibid.). According to Soukup (2006), computer mediated spaces that resemble third places put an emphasis on "conversation, humor and play", they are neutral in nature. Additionally, based on Oldenburg's (1999) arguments on third places, computer mediated spaces act as 'home away from home' and have regular participants (p.424). Soukup strictly emphasizes that the playful tone of conversation that can be observed in computer mediated environments are facilitated by "informal talk" and furthermore argues that many discussions that take places in these online spheres are heavily associated with "liveliness, play and humor". Therefore, he states that these online spheres mostly share a tone of energy, high-spirits and jocularity (Ibid.). Another point of emphasis is that third places that can be identified in computer-mediated spaces manifest an alienation from the "real or physical world" since the interaction in these spaces are enmeshed with the technological nature of the platforms. In light of this, three essential characteristics of virtual third places are identified; "localization, accessibility and presence"(Ibid., p.432).

In Soukup's perspective, online communities and third places have many similarities but also "dramatical differences" that needs more investigation on the matter. He furthermore underlines the main differences of third places than online communities in three categories as follows;

1) "third places emphasize localized community"
2) "third places are social levellers"
3) "third places are accessible" (Wright 2012, p.9-10).

Although Soukup's (2006) conception of 'virtual third place' is probably 'the most sophisticated' combination of the theoretical and empirical work on third places and new media technologies, it must be noted his perspective is not the most accurate for several reasons; his insistence on the local in a networked society and his ideas of accessibility not being accurate for many online communities (Ibid.). Similarly, Wright (2012) emphasizes that Soukup's 'starting point' on his theoretical conception based on the 'dramatical difference' between third places and online communities is 'questionable' (p. 10). As mentioned previously, I agree with Wright on this matter. One of the main points that this study does not agree with Soukup (2006) is his heavy emphasis on 'localization'. He argues that even though the participants of virtual third places are not sharing the "same physical space" because of the global nature of internet technologies, the space must provide a symbolic space that acts as a "localized or situated" place that has geographical or cultural ties to a specific location which in this case might be a town, a city, or a country (p.432-434). In this perspective, Soukup's definition of virtual third places seems rather restrictive and narrow. Furthermore, when identifying virtual third places, Soukup puts a great deal of emphasis on how computer-mediated spaces and communities are highlighted by the atmosphere of playfulness, liveliness and fun established through political talk. However, it cannot be argued that all informal or everyday talk facilitates such emotions or sentiments. As mentioned previously, just as not every public place cannot be identified as a third place, not all online communities can be identified as third places either. However, there are online communities which manifest the core characteristics of Oldenburg's concept of third place and still have no local or geographical ties to a certain location. Both these points that the study does not agree with will be evident in the analysis chapter. Therefore, here I turn to Wright (2012) and his conception of 'third space' rather than calling new public spheres that we observe online as 'virtual third places'. Wright (2012) argues that some online communities and spaces are quite unlike the places that Oldenburg (1999) introduced, there are some that "approximate the core characteristics" (10). As mentioned previously, not all online public spaces can be considered as third places so it is essential to investigate the core characteristics of a place to determine if it is. To carry out such determination, Wright's concept of third space that carefully 'reconsiders' third places "in the context of the Internet" rather than "replicating Oldenburg's concept of third

place" (Ibid; Graham et.al. 2015, p.651), seems suitable. It is essential to point out here that although Wright's work is inspired by Oldenburg's theories, it 'ultimately' differs from his perspective at some points of the drawn conclusions (Wright 2012, p.10), especially his argument on Oldenburg's false privileging of "place over issue-based communities" (Graham et.al. 2015, p.651).

On basic terms, third spaces are identified as "non-political online discussion spaces where political talk emerges". At this point, third places should not be confused with Oldenburg's third places that are offline spaces for individuals to come together and socialize. As a concept, third space strictly signifies public spheres that are online. Although it is possible for a third space to "have a geographical focus", for community formation geographic closeness is not a crucial condition (Wright et.al. 2015, chapter 5, p.2-3). In agreement, Habermas (1992) also argues that public sphere must be detached from the "concrete understanding of its embodiment in physically present, participating, and jointly deciding members of a collectivity" (quoted in Ibid.). It must be underlined that third spaces demonstrate their own set of rules and norms and this aspect is fundamental for community formation. As new media technologies continue to manifest progress, "the distinction between place and space" is blurred. In this perspective, third spaces can easily consist of "geographic and non-geographic communities" since geographical focus is not essential (Wright 2012, p.11), as mentioned previously. Formerly conducted research has shown us that "online forums can be third spaces and are important sites of informal political talk and community formation" (Graham et.al. 2015, p.651; Wright 2012, p.8). Third spaces, resembling Oldenburg's 'third places', are home away from home in which people can engage in informal interactions and among such discussions political and communicative action can occur. Examples of such spaces can address issues of "personal finance, parenting/childcare, popular culture, sports, and hobbies". Scholars working on third spaces argue that these online spaces cultivate a relation between "the personal and political" and can conceivably facilitate the bridging of "the everyday lives of participants and formal politics". Additionally, previous investigations of third spaces prove that everyday talks which occur in these places establish political talk that is complementary, spontaneous and oftentimes deliberative which can inform

"devolved, autonomous self-representation," that has the possibility of stimulating individuals to "mobilize and organize (collective) political action" (Wright et.al. 2015, chapter 5, p.2-3).

Another essential feature of third spaces based on Habermas' and Dahlberg's ideas is that they "cannot be controlled by governments or political parties". Oldenburg goes further saying that that the basic objective of such spaces cannot and should not be "political". In this perspective "a council debating chamber" cannot be identified as a third space (Wright 2012, p.12). Wright (2012) argues that in online spheres there exists a variety of overtly political but autonomous discussion forums alongside ones that are controlled by governments or political parties. Although such spaces go along with Habermas' ideas on public sphere, they cannot be considered as third spaces based on Oldenburg's conceptions. Informed by him, third spaces should strictly be non-political spaces in which political talk come up. It is possible for third spaces to be personal pages of elected representatives or party members on SNS. Nevertheless, the political content in these personal pages cannot monopolize the space under investigation. Although political polarization is a great possibility in spaces where political talk occurs, third spaces can act differently since they do not "have an obvious political slant". People do not manifest cultural participation in third spaces with the intentions of discussing politics, from this perspective, these spaces act more inclusive than politically oriented online platforms which are concerned with more specific issues and views based on their creation (p.12-13). Thus, Wright (2012) suggests that "third spaces may actually facilitate a broader range of information sharing and debate" (p.13).

4.3. Everyday Political Talk

Over the past two decades, there has been extensive debate on the capacity of the internet in cultivating online public spheres in which "free and open deliberation" as well as informative communication among citizens can thrive. Scholars have observed increasing levels of individuals participating in cultural spheres by engaging in discussions in online spheres and

communities, specifically by making use of "storytelling and reporting via blogging and twittering" as citizens. For many, this meant fostering of fundamental characteristics of public spheres that can also be observed in online spheres with their power of facilitating communication and conversation among individuals such as everyday political talk. These online public spheres or as they are considered in the context of this thesis, third spaces have been investigated in various ways. Nonetheless, "the research has focused mostly on *political* spaces attached to a conventional notion of politics" such as "political forums, party webpages". This is problematic in a sense that everyday political talk does not only occur in essentially political spaces or that political talk is not only bound to "party politics" (Graham 2010, p.26; Graham et.al. 2015, p.650). Although these investigations added much value to scientific literature, if we intend to understand how citizenship is connected to features and experiences of ordinary everyday lives (Graham et.al. 2015, p.650), a "renewed focus… on the informal, everyday political talk that occurs online" is needed (Wright 2012, p.7). Here, it must be underlined that as previously mentioned we cannot treat popular cultural and political action as disconnected phenomena. Popular culture is an entity that "should be understood as part of politics, since people live through culture" and cultural values that emerge based on the cultural context we live in, are operationalized in politics. From this perspective, popular culture can be identified as political activity through its various ways of utilization (Graham & Hajru 2011, p.21). Therefore, thinking of politics and popular culture going hand in hand, investigation of everyday political talk in third spaces- or online public spheres- enables us to glimpse "into the lifeworld"; how cultural production and reproduction work, how social unification and socialization take place (Graham et.al. 2015, p.650). The investigation of everyday political talk also caters to an understanding of "how people talk politics online… and how such talk occurs outside conventional political communicative spaces" (Graham 2010, p.26). Additionally, investigating political talk outside the traditional spaces of politics would not only make us understand how political talk takes place but also the "linkages people make between their everyday lives and society" (Graham & Hajru 2011, p.30).

As mentioned many times in this study, political discussion or deliberation in other words have been deemed as an imperative part of democracy and as identified by Dahlgren (2003), there are six elements needed for democracy and civic culture to prosper; "knowledge, values, identities, affinity, experience and discussion" (Graham et.al. 2015, p.649). Graham and his fellow scholars (2015) argue that it is the element of discussion or everyday talk in particular, "through which the other dimensions become actualized, circulated and reinforced". They also underline that Habermas' conception of the public sphere argues that deliberative modes of democracy are kept together through forms of everyday political talk, which creates a network of conversations and discussions "over time and across various (communicative) spaces" paving the way for providing information to voters, "shaping views and challenging opinions". In this perspective, they state that everyday political talk advances different "forms of political engagement and mobilization". Although the importance of political talk is recognized broadly, only formal notions of it have been extensively studied. In these studies, how everyday political talk was defined proved to be 'narrow' and not fitting "the ambiguity and everydayness of online spaces (Graham et.al. 2015, p.649-650). Thus, Coleman and Blumler (2009) emphasize that the rational notions of deliberation which are based on a "deep, sombre, rationally-bounded cerebral rumination" are "more suited to the Senior Common Room than the workplace, community hall or public square" (quoted in Ibid.). In this perspective, everyday political talk cannot only be identified with rationality through argumentation and not-so-rational modes of political talk should be taken into consideration. An important reason for this is the fact that "everyday reality of politics is typically rooted in people's personal, subjective experiences" (Graham et.al. 2015, p.649-650). Kim and Kim (2008) also emphasize that it is through different modes of everyday political talk identity formation of citizens is made possible and social changes that are "more democratically important" come into being. (Wright 2012, p.7). In this vein, everyday political talk should be seen from a broader perspective that shifts the focus from the rational to a more extensive idea of communication which includes "emotions, humour, rhetoric and private issues" (Wright 2012, p.16).

Furthermore, the inclusion of everyday political talk in scholarly investigations is not enough on its own. The researcher should also be more comprehensive about what political is when investigating everyday political talk. According to Graham and Hajru (2011), public spheres such as third spaces feature "new issues and concerns about society". They are arenas in which the idea of political evolves and changes over time, thus, "a restrictive notion of political talk" somehow contradicts standards and aims of the public sphere in the first place (p.29). This brings us to our argument of creating a more extensive outlook on what political talk is and what constitutes everyday political talk in third spaces. Inspired by Wright and his co-workers (2015), it is also argued in thesis that " for the adoption of a more expansive notion of political talk: one that embraces the vernacular, expressive and porous characteristics of everyday public speech" (chapter 5, p.2). When defined narrowly, political talk consists of communication about political action such as "party politics" but when we want to define political talk in a broader manner, it includes "the functioning of civil society and citizens… in connection to non-political issues". In our perspective, everyday political talk differs from the forms of deliberation that can be observed in assemblies of 'public decision-making' and it is not particularly directed towards "decision-making or direct political action" per se. Everyday political talk is expressive (Graham & Hajru 2011, p.20) and it is heavily concerned with the "lifestyle values and the personal narratives" that people systematize "their political and social meanings around" progressively (Graham 2010, p.26). In this context the thesis turns to Wright et.al. (2015) and define everyday political talk in their terms;

1.Political talk emerges in the course of everyday conversations and discussions, often as intertwined with topics that do not manifest " a political character".

2. Political talk consists of humdrum ruminations "upon power, its uses and ramifications".

3.Political talk has characteristics that grant it the possibility to assist "meaningful public action" (Wright et.al. 2015, chapter 5, p.2).

Although the political potential of third spaces as facilitators of democracy depends on the "tension between the private and the public" by enabling discussions that can surpass geographic boundaries and ensure anonymity, they still do not guarantee that there will be understanding

among people from different backgrounds. As argued by some scholars, for online discussions to be democratizing, political conversations -everyday political talk- that occur in online spheres must contain bidirectional topics of argument that feature shared interests, and must be stimulated "by a mutually shared commitment in rational and focused discourses". In this aspect, everyday political talk can connect individuals but also might facilitate polarization regarding the cultural differences they have. Therefore, an idealistic outlook of rationality, consensus and a greater good that Habermas insistently argues on, the forms of communication while investigating third spaces is not observed to be that "ideal" (Papacharissi 2009, p.231-235). Papacharissi (2009) reminds us that although anonymity facilitates the expression of political views, these expressions do not necessarily lead to discussions of "greater substance or political impact" or an accepting attitude among individuals who hold different views (p.235). Illuminated by previous studies, a reason for this is that the social bonds individuals develop in online spaces do not automatically encourage trust; "on the contrary, evidence suggests that online forums frequently bring together mistrusting people" (Papacharissi 2009, p.235). Such mistrust results in individuals approaching to others' political views with skepticism, prejudice and dissent. Although the potential of digital media as a democratizing tool was welcomed enthusiastically and hopes of citizens making use of digital media for a "healthy dose of direct democracy" that in some instances fall short in 'representative democracy', contemporary research has shown us that while digital media are used for political means vastly, "it does not fit the mold of the Habermasian public sphere and promotes direct democracy selectively" (Papacharissi 2009, p.239). In this aspect, I move on to create a theoretical understanding of "agonistic" and antagonistic" forms of everyday political talk that can be observed in third spaces.

4.4. Antagonism and Agonism

To understand how everyday political talk can be qualified agonistic or antagonistic, first we need to understand the concepts of antagonism and agonism as ideas of democratic participation. I base the concept of antagonism on Carl Schmitt's political theories. Although Schmitt was

involved in Nazi activities in Germany, this does not mean we have to overlook his conception of antagonism and his scholarly work which is in our case quite useful and sophisticated- because of moral judgement. On basic grounds, Schmitt (1996) believes that setting up of the political relies on an operative rule of "friend-and-enemy grouping". Although this criterion is essential for him, it is not an "exhaustive definition of the political" (Camargo 2013, p.166-167).

According to Schmitt (2007), political motivations and actions can be diminished to a "specific political distinction" that of a relationship between a friend and an enemy. Just like there is a binary balance in our everyday moral and aesthetic judgements, such as good and bad, ugly and beautiful, he believes that there should be a binary distinction of friend and enemy as a criterion of political behaviour (p. 26-27). For Schmitt (2007) the "distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation" and such distinction can occur both in theory and practice. According to him, the political 'Other' who holds different values does not have to be "morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor", and at some points it might even present advantages to engage with this 'Other' in business agreements. But the essential point here is that the perception of the political other must rely on enmity. As Schmitt (2007) suggests, the "other" is "the stranger" and it is enough reason for him to be perceived as the enemy since he, in his nature resembles an "alien" and he is different in his existence as well as in his views. Therefore, it is possible to engage in extreme cases of conflicts with him. The distinction of such political participants as "enemies" relies on recognition, understanding and judgement of the actual circumstances in which the views of 'the other' or 'the enemy' should be formed as an entity to be "repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence". From an emotional point of view, the enemy can be easily identified as an evil or ugly entity because all kinds of distinction and specifically the political ones "as the strongest and most intense of the distinctions and categorizations, draws upon other distinctions for support". However, this does not have to be the case for every enemy and the reverse might also be possible. People who can indeed be considered as ugly, evil or economically hazardous might not necessarily be positioned as our enemies in political spheres when they hold similar values to us, they would rather be our

allies. Likewise people who we would consider as good, beautiful or economically beneficial can be positioned as our enemies with their contradicting values to ours, therefore, it would not be possible to call them as friends in any political sense (Ibid.). Similarly, Mouffe (2005) explains that identity creation indicates "establishment of a difference, difference which is often constructed on the basis of a hierarchy". The distinction of identity creation can be exemplified with the binary opposition of "form and matter, black and white, man and woman". When it is understood that identities are "relational" and the assertion of one's identity through difference is "a precondition for the existence of any identity", it is possible for us to understand Schmitt and his antagonism (15). Although Mouffe (2005) emphasizes that formation of a collective political identity of 'we' depends on the separation of a 'they' and there is in fact a likelihood "that this we/they relation can become antagonistic". However, she does not agree that such distinctions of identity creation have to be necessarily of friend/enemy or antagonistic. Rather, she argues that 'the Other' does not have to be perceived as threatening the existence of 'we' (p.16) which I will explain later in relation to agonism.

Schmitt (2007) underlines that nations are grouped based on the "friend and enemy antithesis" and such distinctions based on grouping are a constant possibility for all the individuals that are existent in the political sphere. He furthermore underlines that the political 'Other' in not just a competitor or someone we are engaged in a conflict with. He is not someone that we hate privately or personally, based on our feelings or experiences. The enemy is merely "the public enemy" and he is "*hostis,* not *inimicus*" (p.28-29). In this perspective, we must understand that the distinction of friend/enemy and the act of antagonism does not rely on individual passions or emotions but rather on strict political values and ideals on a collective level. Schmitt (2007) calls the political as "the most intense and extreme antagonism". For him antagonism becomes much more political when it reaches its optimum and as it gets closer to the distinction of 'friend-enemy grouping' (p.29). Additionally, Schmitt (2007) underlines that the antagonistic political distinction of friend/enemy does not only manifest itself in state institutions but in everyday lives of individuals. He states that elements of the political are incorporated in the framework of "concrete antagonism" is articulated in our everyday lives through language and

most of the time people are not aware of it. Such antagonistic attitudes in his perspective become apparent in everyday talk. Everyday talk or daily speech holds polemical meanings in relation to "all political concepts, images, and terms". Such meanings concentrate on a particular discord and "are bound to a concrete situation" which can be observed among social relationships of the members of the society. With their concentration on certain conflicts and situations, these meanings create "friend-enemy grouping(s)" (p.30). Such antagonistic attitudes will be further presented and analyzed in the analysis chapter based on our findings.

In line with Schmitt's ideas of political action and antagonism, Chantall Mouffe (2005) has created the concept of pluralistic agonism. According to Mouffe "democratic life presupposes incompletion, uncertainty and openness rather than consensus or harmonious coexistence". According to her agonistic theory, the political always consists of the distinction of 'us' and 'them' which cannot possibly be solved by demanding reasonable thinking. In her perspective, such frontiers create "pluralism of value systems" that constitutes the element of democracy. Additionally, she emphasizes that pluralism is an existent part of democratic life and differences and disagreements must be recognized and accepted as well as "expressed agonistically" rather than dealt with as mere "conflicts" (Tambakaki 2014, p.2-3). For Mouffe, agonism is a "democratic form of struggle" that involves a confrontation between adversaries.

To understand agonistic action, Mouffe (2005) underlines that the distinction of us/them-we/they must be considered with a different approach than how antagonism perceives it. Unlike Schmitt's conception of antagonism that draws the friend/enemy distinction which sees 'the Other' as a threat to be eliminated, Mouffe (2005) contends that there are different ways of seeing 'the Other' even though the friend/ enemy distinction manifests itself as constant (p.15-16). Mouffe (2005) emphasizes that the friend/ enemy grouping is only one way to express political views in an antagonistic manner which constitutes the political. In her perspective, although it is essential to acknowledge antagonism as a basis for political action, there is the possibility of its "taming" which she proposes to call "agonism" (p.20). She describes the agonistic we/they distinction as a relationship in which opposing parties recognize that they do not hold the same values and ideas

and there "is no rational solution to their conflict". However, they acknowledge "the legitimacy of their opponents" as their adversaries and not see them as enemies to be hated (Ibid.).

In this aspect, Mouffe reminds us that unlike enemies that can engage in violence to eliminate opposing views that, "adversaries share something in common" even though they do not hold the same views. What they hold in common is the "grammar of democratic life". The struggle and confrontation of adversaries do not have to "take on an extreme, violent form" when pluralistic agonism, which respects and accepts other forms of political views, is acknowledged (Tambakaki 2014, p.3). Mouffe (2005) states that the aim of democracy is and should be to convert antagonism into agonism. Thus, the category of 'adversary' holds an extensive importance in "democratic politics". Unlike the category of 'the enemy', she argues that the new "adversarial model has to be seen as constitutive democracy" because it emphasizes the equality of different sides even though their views might differ dramatically. In short, the transformation of the enemy into the adversary demonstrates how antagonism can be tamed (p.20). It is important to note here that what Mouffe (2005) means by the category of adversary. In her work, the idea of adversary is not the same that can be seen "in liberal discourse" which perceives the adversary as "simply a competitor". From the perspective of liberal discourse, an adversary is someone to compete with to hold the dominant positions of power and displace others to reside in their place and the political arena they participate in is a "neutral ground". They do not try to challenge the existent power relations or transform them (p.21) Mouffe (2005) calls this kind of political action simply as a contest "among elites". However, in an agonistic struggle with an adversary, the exact composition of power relations "around which a given society is structured" is aimed to be challenged. In this sense, the agonistic struggle takes place between conflicting "hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally" (Ibid). Mouffe states that in 'political,' the antagonistic distinctions and groupings are constantly present and their confrontation is genuine in existence but with the taming of antagonisms into agonisms, the game of democracy can be "played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries" (p.21).

5. Methodology

5.1 Netnography: A Research Methodology for Virtual Environments

With the emergence of virtual communities, qualitative research methods have quickly revealed their limits. In the face of these challenges, in 1997 Kozinets proposed the netnographic method (which is a combination of the words *network* and *ethnography*) in order to study virtual environments. This method takes the classical steps of ethnography and adapts them to study online communities (Kozinets. 2006). Indeed, ethnography, which was born as a branch of anthropology, is the method par excellence used for the study of groups, social sciences and fields of social research beyond. Although the first use of netnography was in consumer science, its use is not limited to this field of research and can be applied to any study that aims to understand a problem from a cultural perspective. Thus, these two methods have several similarities with ethnography, in particular regarding their field approach and the investigative stages they apply. In both disciplines, the researcher is considered as an essential instrument for research. Similarly to ethnography, netnography allows the researcher to understand the symbols, the lingua and practices of social groups, but this time in a very specific context, in that of the World Wide Web.

Netnography has been initially developed to study the consumer behavior but ever-increasing number of internet users and online communities has made it relevant for other fields as well. This method has been used in various fields such as management, sociology, information technology and — more closely related to my research — in communication. An example would be the study conducted by Hewer and Brownlie (2007) in order to understand the virtual communities of car enthusiasts. Eurovision Song Contest can be no exception, even more "when we come to particular topics such as the world of contemporary music, television, celebrity of motion picture fan communities… our cultural portrayal would be extremely limited without detailed reference to the online data and computer-mediated communications that increasingly make these social collectives possible" (Kozinets, 2010. p. 3)

The interest of netnography lies in the fact that it allows for the study of online interaction among individuals on a topic of interest without intervening therein. It is a natural method of investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that uses publicly available information on the Web to identify and understand the needs as well as the decisions of social groups (Kozinets, 2009). Considering the nature and limitations of the blog selected by me as well as my research aims, netnography emerged as the most suitable method to achieve my research goals. Kozinets (2010) also argues that netnographic research is already signaling that "significant time was spent interacting within and becoming a part of an online community or culture" (p. 60) which has been the case of mine since I familiarised myself with Wiwibloggs.com for over a year before starting my research.

As Elo et.al.(2014) suggests, qualitative content analysis is one of the methodological tools that can be used to analyze and interpret data (p.1). In simple terms and when considered in the scope of media and communication studies, qualitative content analysis is the method used by scholars to analyze "written, verbal or visual communication messages" (Elo & Kyngas 2008, p.107). Drisko and Maschi (2015) argue that qualitative content analysis can be identified with a set of techniques to systematically analyze all sorts of texts through manifesting not only the available content for the researcher but additionally "themes and core ideas found in texts as primary content" (Drisko & Maschi 2015, p.82). According to Kim and Kuljis (2010), qualitative content analysis is generally dependent on a researcher's perspective and akin to textual analysis which in its nature is interpretive and usually does not make use of statistical forms of research to analyze complex data (p.370). In general, qualitative content can be used in two different ways: inductive or deductive and according to Elo and colleagues (2014), both ways of investigation include "three main phases: preparation, organization, and reporting of results" (p.1). At this point, it is important to emphasize what kind of features qualitative research demonstrates on general grounds. According to Atieno (2009) scholars who engage in qualitative research are

concerned with meaning of things, how individuals "make sense of their lives, experiences" and how they perceive the world around themselves (p. 14). Additionally, qualitative research is dependent on the researcher as the elementary instrument to collect and analyze data. Thus, the data are "mediated through this human instrument" instead of being generated through software, machines or inventories. Furthermore, qualitative research usually consists of fieldwork which requires the researcher to interact with people and observe them in their natural 'habitat'. Lastly, qualitative research is "descriptive" in a way that the researcher is concerned with meaning making processes, the created meanings and the understanding attained by " words or pictures" (Ibid.).

For decades, the dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative modes of content analysis has been a part of the focus of scholarly discussion in relation to research methodologies. According to Kracauer (1952), approaching content analysis from a quantitative perspective often demonstrated limitations in research. He stated that through quantitative analysis the idea of meaning is not all the time manifested since meaning is often complex, contextual, and best determined holistically. Furthermore, certain meanings might not be observed repetitively but that does not necessarily mean "it is not important or meaningful" (cited in Drisko & Maschi 2015, p.83). Similarly, Thomson et al. (1998) argue that although quantitative content analysis hold the power to include considerable amount of data, it is reductionist in a sense that all data is diminished into "numbers and frequencies that are suitable for statistical analysis". Thus, in their perspective, such reductionism leads the researcher to disregard exquisite "nuances and patterns of the discourse" (cited in Pfeil & Zaphiris 2010, p.7).

In light of these arguments, Sandelowski (2000) argues that unlike the quantitative counterpart, qualitative content analysis goes deeper into the "domain of interpretation" and is the ideal method when a researcher wants to engage in "descriptive qualitative research" (cited in Drisko & Maschi 2015, p.86-87). Additionally, Moretti et.al. (2011) argue that what makes qualitative research advantageous is the fact that the collected data tends to be rich and the coding as well as the interpreting of such data is undertaken in a "valid and reliable way" (cited in Elo et.al.

2014,p. 6). According to Krippendorff (1980), there are additionally more advantages of qualitative content analysis. He states that qualitative content analysis is "unobtrusive", it is "contend sensitive" and capable of dealing with large quantities of data and from his perspective its "unstructured" nature enables the researcher to be flexible and reflexive (cited in Kim & Kuljis 2010, p.370). Considering media and communication studies in particular, qualitative content analysis can be utilized to investigate the user generated contents on Social Networking Sites that are facilitated by technologies of Web 2.0. From this perspective, it can be argued that qualitative content analysis can further the analysis of "social and communicational trends and patterns as well as user's attitudes, preferences, and behaviours" (Kim & Kuljis 2010, p.373). From this perspective, Pfeil and Zaphiris (2010) emphasize that qualitative content analysis turns out to be the most frequently preferred and used method to investigate forms of messaging and talk in online communities (p.7).

5.2 Time, Duration and Platform of Data Collection

For this research, I chose Wiwibloggs.com as a platform where everyday political talk takes place in a "non-institutionalised online arenas." (Svensson. 2015) Another reason why I chose this specific blog is because it was the most-read independent Eurovision blog in 2016, as stated in the introduction. The blog is owned by William Lee Adams, an American journalist who is based in London. While the editor and a few team members are based in London, UK, most team members are from other countries. As a result, the blog is coordinated online. They have a private Facebook group where story ideas are shared, topics are discussed, work is allocated, etc. Individual team members may also privately chat online. Some team members also travel to various events, such as national finals in other countries and the Eurovision Song Contest itself. During the two-week period of Eurovision, a number of team members work together, based in the press centre in the host city. In total, there are 58 core contributors, including writers, video editors and graphic designers. The main focus of Wiwibloggs.com is the Eurovision Song

Contest, looking at the current contest as well as historical aspects. There is broader focus on past and present Eurovision acts. The site provides both news-based coverage as well as posts with more of an entertainment focus. To a lesser extent, Wiwibloggs also covers the Junior Eurovision Song Contest. The blog is run in English. Every post published has a discussion space at the bottom of the page. There is no separate discussion forum. Posts using common English swear words, racist, sexist and homophobic terms are automatically held for moderation and would only be published under exceptional circumstances. There is no formal moderation policy (though this is something they are discussing) but generally any post that is abusive, racist, sexist, homophobic or personally attacking another person is moderated.

The blog is public, and users can share their opinions in a simple and straightforward way, without the need to sign up on the platform. To familiarise myself with the content of the blog and the nature of comments left on the platform, I read the news stories on the blog from January 2016 until March 2017 on a weekly basis. This allowed me to have a better understanding of the blog as well as the general sentiments expressed by the users in the comments section. The knowledge I had acquired over this time period was crucial to come up with the research questions which at that stage were only my personal observations and lacked scientific proof.

The process of the data collection itself took place between the 1st of March 2017 and 31st of March 2017.

I chose specifically the month of March for the research because this month coincides with the pre-Eurovision season when different countries announce their participants, release music and official videos. Thus the blog in this period has a lot of news to report, which increases the traffic as a consequence. More traffic on the blog also translates into more comments. On figure 1 it can be seen that in 2016, March was the first month with significant traffic on the blog. It continued growth through April and culminated in May which is the month when the contest usually takes place.
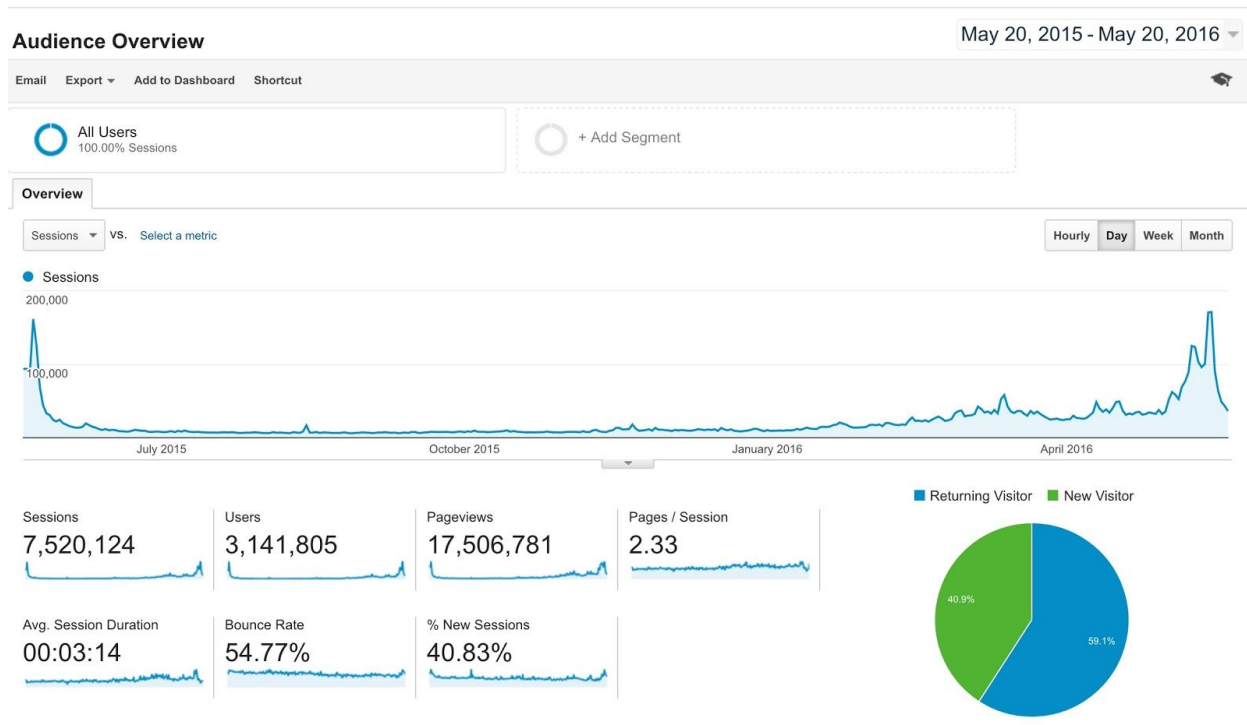
Figure 1. *Traffic of the blog in 2016. (Wiwibloggs.com)*

In total there were 242 news articles posted in March 2017 which had amassed 12 627 comments. To deal with the large amount of data, I was fully committed to my netnographic research reading the news stories everyday and most importantly, the comments which followed them. While most of the time the comments section was free of politics certain articles sparked political debates. These articles and their comments section could be compared to gold mines for a netnographer. The comments which carried directly or indirectly political undertones were copied from the blog and gathered in a separate document which at the end of the month was used to draw qualitative analysis from. The number of comments in my work file amounted 187 by the end of the month. It is important to understand that these comments were carefully selected by the me according to my subjective judgment that they were most valuable for the research. Filtering of the data is also suggested by Kozinets (2010) "The researcher may require several levels of filtering for relevance." Had I copied all comments which concerned politics and were published on the blog, the number would be much greater. The debate during the data-collection period took place on various topics. Two topics were distinguished which will be

presented in detail later. One was the controversy over Russia's participation in Eurovision in Ukraine and another, more broad discussion whether there is place for politics at the Eurovision Song Contest.

5.3 Drawbacks of the Research

The main downside of this method of data collection is that it is not possible to identify the exact number of people participating in the discussions. Users have the possibility to post under many different usernames and exploit the system. The comments section is similar to a public conversation.

Another disadvantage of this method is that because the users do not have profiles or do not share their full names or contact information in the comments, it has made it infeasible for me to contact them in private. That has led me to choose content analysis as my main method. My analysis is based on the information available to the public. I do acknowledge it would enrich my research if there had been a chance to interview certain users and discuss their motivations behind their engagement in political discussions on a music blog.

Since content analysis is one of the main components of netnography, and the main method of my research, besides its benefits which are mentioned above, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations and challenges. Sometimes studies utilizing content analysis can be considered as poor in a theoretical foundation since it is more focused on finding out what can be directly found in the empirical data. Additionally, content analysis cannot give holistic answers considering a phenomenon when used on its own. To cope with this limitation, the analysis can be supported by different methods such as surveys or interviews (Kim & Kuljis 2010, p.370). In the case of this thesis, such a limitation was considered and rather than only looking at empirical data on its own, interviews were conducted to generate a richer data set which includes different perspectives other than the researcher's. To tackle the limitation of content analysis being weak in theoretical foundation, this study created a set of analytical tools to guide the empirical

analysis. Thus, the data was analyzed in line with concepts of cultural and political participation as well as agonism and antagonism. Additionally, since the Web-based user-created content tends to accumulate rapidly or can be lost among large bulks of content, this situation can also present challenges and limitations. However, this limitation can be overcome through "rapid data collection and downloading websites" (Ibid.). In this study, to prevent such a challenge rapid data collection was utilized and all the detected content was stored by copying and pasting everyday political talk that occurs on Wiwibloggs.com.

Another challenging aspect of qualitative content analysis is that it does not advance "in a linear fashion" and it is more arduous to conduct that quantitative content analysis because it is " less standardized and formulaic". When it comes to qualitative content analysis there are no pre-set rules how to conduct a particular study and each study has distinctive features that should be considered when creating a research design. At this point, the researcher has the role of measuring suitable approaches to a study which can be the most beneficial and feasible. In this vein, qualitative content analysis presents itself as more "flexible" and there are many different ways it can be done (Elo & Kyngas 2008, p.113)

Lastly, I would like to address the netnographic style of this research, which was observational, compared to participatory version of netnography where the researcher is actively engaged with the members of an online community. While non-participant approach can draw some questions of the netnographic orientation of the research it has its advantages too. "It is possible to conduct a purely observational netnography, the recommended participant—observational stance very often dictates an interview component. (Kozinets 2010, p.46).

5.4 Interviews with the Bloggers

To counterbalance the problem that I was not able to interview the authors of the comments I decided to interview the journalists of the blog. Considering that a researcher has a big influence over a qualitative work I intended to minimize this influence and diversify the research by

including the opinions of the journalists. Using interviews as a complementary method along with content analysis for a netnographic research is an approved choice. Kozinets (2010) remarks that netnography "incorporates a vast variety of different research techniques and approaches." (p.42) My choice to conduct online interviews is supported by Kozinets' claim that online interviews are as essential for a netnographic research as a topic of interviewing is intertwined with the conduct of ethnography. (p. 45-46)

It should be clarified from the beginning that terms journalists and bloggers refer to the same people in the text. It was possible to contact them since their full names were listed under each news story written by them. First, I came up with a set of questions relevant for my research, then I approached the journalists by e-mail and presented my research. Three of the journalists agreed to participate in this study and they received the questions from me.

The questions were the following:

1. What do you think motivates people to leave political comments on the blog?
2. Can of you think of any news story which sparked a political debate?
3. What do you think about the nature of the political comments? (Constructive/insulting, etc)
4. Do you think people are trying to come to certain consensus?
5. Have you personally engaged in any such debates?
6. Have you found comments left on the blog educational in some ways?

In total 3 journalists of the blog were interviewed. The journalists were chosen randomly with only one condition that they were from different countries, decreasing the chances of a political bias. The journalists, which sent the complete answers back to me, were from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, two males and one female.

Some of the answers of the journalists are presented in the following chapters (see 6.2) along with data collected through content analysis of the news comments left by regular users (see 6.1 and 6.3)

5.5 Ethics

In May 2016 an opportunity emerged to inform the blog owner William Lee Adams that I would be studying the comments section of Wiwibloggs.com. Even though all the information used for this research is available to the general public it can be added that he gave me a verbal confirmation that I could carry out my research.

Further considering the ethical issues of the research, it is worth to note that, despite the blog being public, the real identities of the users are not revealed since most users post using a nickname. I chose not even to show the nicknames of the commenters, in case they included sensitive information. For example, when there is a quote of a particular comment found on the blog, it is referred as posted by the "User" and their actual usernames are not revealed. This way I have managed to guarantee the authors' anonymity.

Concerning the interviews with the bloggers, they had an opportunity to participate in the interview and stay anonymous. None of the journalists of the blog chose this option, instead they allowed me to use their full names. Their names are mentioned in the presentation of the interview results along the answers they provided me with.

6. Presentation and Analysis of Results

At first glance Wiwibloggs.com looks like any other colourful blog meant for entertainment purposes. But an international music contest, which had participants from as many as 42 countries this year, offers more depth than just music. Scholars have studied and long argued whether politics affects the voting in the contest. "Political considerations are often thought to be a factor in Eurovision Song Contest voting patterns." (Hennig et.al. 2013). In this aspect, Wiwibloggs.com proves itself to be a third space, it is a non-institutionalized space created by ordinary people to discuss Eurovision and to be updated about what is going on with the contest each year. Wiwibloggs can easily be identified as a space that is "beyond the home or workplace where people can meet and interact informally" as Oldenburg suggests (Wright 2012, p.8). The informal communication setting creates a fertile ground for cultural participation in relation to the Eurovision Song Contest, enabling "social life, community bonding and inclusion of everyday individuals" as previously emphasized (see 4.2.). Similarly Wiwibloggs is initiated as a place where people engage in cultural participation through their news, ideas and comments related to the ESC, due to its previously mentioned features, it can be identified as a third space. A third space in which people from all over the world come and create a community of Eurovision fans, discuss music, entertainment, new songs and singers of the year but also a space where everyday political talk 'pops up' and paves the way for political participation. On the issue of Wiwibloggs as a safe space for Eurovision fans, surprisingly there are hints of antagonistic and agonistic behavior when people engage in everyday political talk. As I have mentioned in the literature review, although everyday political talk is closely related to deliberative democracy, Wiwibloggs as a third space demonstrates that communication among the ESC fans "takes a political turn without the initial intention to do so" (Svensson 2015, p.285). Therefore, it is possible to argue that not all forms of everyday political talk are intentional, rational or directed towards consensus or understanding.

6.1 Presentation of Data Posted in March 2017

During the process of data collection, at first it was not obvious that commenters were politically motivated. This year the majority of the comments were music related in their nature, as they should normally have been. The game changer was news shared on March 12th 2017. The blog reported that Russia had confirmed its participation in this year's contest in Ukraine.

Before I move onto describing the reaction of readers in the comments section it should be understood that comments are following a news article thus the blogger has an influence to spark a political debate whether it is intentional or not. I acknowledge that most of the political comments found on the blog were to some extent reactions to the news stories containing political undertones. This acknowledgment should be seen as a critical reflection of the research since observing political comments under completely apolitical news stories would be far greater phenomenon.

As an example, the above mentioned news, which was the first one of the series about Russia's participation and then withdrawal from the contest, read "With Eurovision 2017 taking place in geopolitical rival Ukraine, fears were high that Russia might withdraw from the party owing to anti-Russian sentiment." (see *Appendix A, article 1*) The political events such as accession of the Crimean peninsula by Russia and a hybrid war in Donbas are some of the recent events which have further shaped Ukraine's pro-European orientation and increased anti-Russian sentiments. (Stepanenko, Pylynskyi, 2015)

Russia's artist for 2017 was the wheelchair-using singer Yuliya Samoylova. While the author of the article expressed his opinion that Russian choice "fits nicely with the Eurovision 2017 theme #CelebrateDiversity" he also shared his thoughts that it could have been a well-planned move against the anti-Russian sentiment present in Ukraine. "Owing to geopolitical sensitivities, Russian acts have faced extreme hostility at Eurovision in recent years, with the teenage Tolmachevy Sisters and Polina Gagarina facing loud and overt booing in 2014 and 2015." (*see Appendix A, article 1*) Regardless of the motives behind this choice the blog supported the artist's participation.

The selection of an artist was enough to stir controversy which immediately divided the fans and the blog users. The following comments I have grouped as "Anti-Russian" and "Pro-Russian" as mentioned in earlier sections. After the news story was published it took couple of minutes for comments to emerge. One user wrote "*I never knew Russia could go this low. Russia is the villain in the whole political thing and of course they sent a woman in a wheelchair so people will pity her, and then them. Low, thats very low. They are using her.*"

Another user with a similar sentiments wrote "*The fact that Russia uses a singer with disabilities to serve their political agenda and ensure their likeability is a disgrace both to the artist and to the contest in general. They should be ashamed.*"

On the contrary, others, while not claiming that it was a random selection of the artist without any back story, claimed that Russia had the right to choose whoever they liked. *"I don't know why people are complaining. It seems logical to me that russia wants to send an artist that can avoid the booing."* There were ones who praised Russia for its tactics. *"She might actually win. Russia is tough when it comes to mind games."*

No one could guess that this was only a beginning of something greater, the biggest political drama of this year's contest.

Two days later on March 14th the blog reported yet another news about Russia's participation. (See appendix, article 2) This time about the Ukrainian Intelligence Agency (UIA) which was investigating the singer over her performance in the Crimean city of Kerch in 2015, which could potentially bar her from entering the host country of this year's contest. (Dw.com, 2017)

The involvement of the Intelligence Agency truly turned a debate over the issue into a political one and sparked an even more important discussion on a much greater topic whether Eurovision Song Contest itself should be completely free of politics. The comments presented below are

from groups previously labeled as "Comments against political Eurovision" and "Comments in favour of political Eurovision."

"*I'm so tired of this! This is music! not politics! I know the relations among both countries but they shouldn't take this contest for exhausting political scandals! Let the music unite us, no matter what!*" and "*I'm sick of this. This is Song Contest, not European Parliament. [...] Music should have nothing to do with politics!*"

Like the authors of the above-mentioned comments, some believe that the song contest is supposedly there to unite Europe. Although there were ones who thought it was not possible to simply detach politics from an international event. *I think this absurd belief that we can completely block off politics from eurovision is stupid, Russia literally invaded another participating country 3 years ago, we're supposed to just ignore that and applaud this woman? Nah. Sorry."*

Another user argued that the ESC is essentially about politics and that is the way it was meant to be. *"So many delusionally believing Eurovision is a musical contest. If you want music you should go to different genres festivals. In Eurovision everything is politics. Different agendas pushed by different states and by non state actors.*

It is what makes it interesting."

Finally, there were ones who tried to find the middle ground by stating "*Eurovision must be outside politics, but not outside law."*

This specific situation resulted in a chain of news stories, as additional details were emerged continuously with intervals of few days. Judging by the number of comments, the topic became the most discussed story over the period of the pre-Eurovision season on the blog.

The following news on the blog included the rumour that the Ukrainian Intelligence Agency had drafted a document which would prohibit the Russian artist from entering Ukraine (as of 20th of April 2017 this article had generated 231 comments), (*see appendix A, article 3*) then news on

official confirmation that the specific singer was banned from entering the country (457 comments), (*see appendix A, article* 4) followed by the offer of the EBU to Russia allowing them to participate via satellite (246 comments), (*see appendix A, article 6*) and Russia's official statement on withdrawing from this year's contest (219 comments), (*see appendix A, article 11*).

In terms of numbers, Russia's withdrawal from the contest became the most discussed news article of the month while the second most discussed article was concerning Russia's participation in this year's contest published less than two weeks earlier. In general any news story, in relation to Russia, except one gathered over 100 comments and was much more discussed compared to other news of the respective day. On the figure 2 the number of comments under Russian news are marked in red while every comments for other news are marked in black. The figure clearly illustrates the attention this chain of news articles gathered during the data collection period.

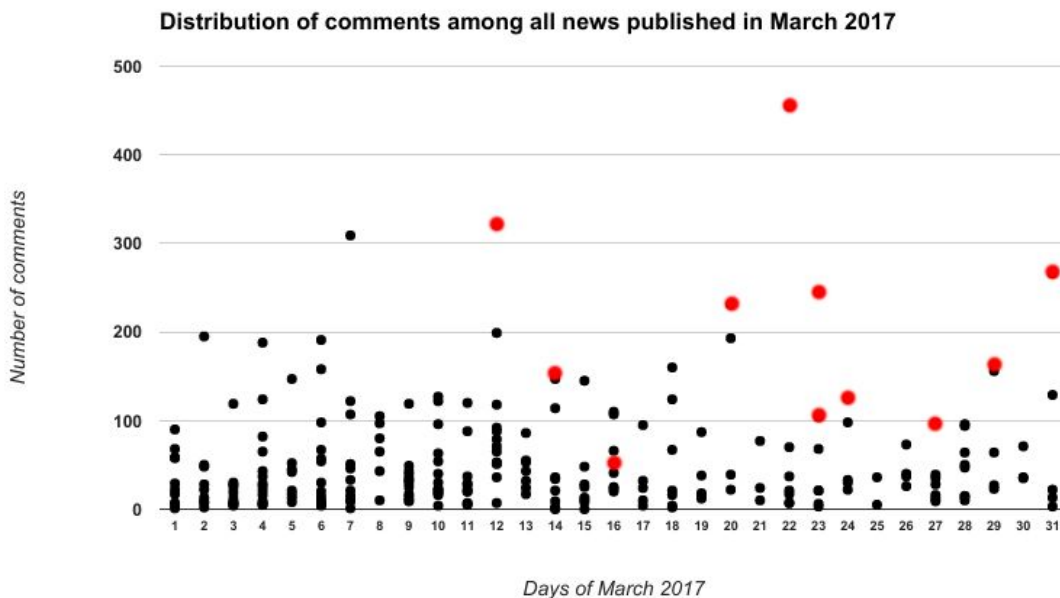Distribution of comments among all news published in March 2017

Figure 2. *Distribution of comments among the news articles published in March 2017 on Wiwibloggs.com. Author's work.*

The never-ending release of details around the controversy engaged hundreds of people on the blog and drew attention until most of them grew tired of the story. "*Can we please stop talking about Russia and focus on the contestants. This is getting really, really boring.*"

Covering the news and comments published in a selected timeframe showed that there are certain cases when the discussion goes beyond music and users are citing and referring to historical and political events from the offline world. The number of comments showed that the controversy over Russia's participation in the contest in 2017 became the most debated news story in the year's pre-Eurovision season on the blog.

6.2 Interviews with the Journalists of the Blog

In this section the data collected through the interviews will be presented. In total three international journalists of Wiwibloggs were interviewed. By the end of the presentation a reader might notice similarities in the answers of the journalists to some extent. It is worthy to note that the interviews took place separately and they did not have any influence on each other's answers. As stated in the ethics section the interviewees chose not to hide their identity. They are Edd Keith from the United Kingdom who joined the Wiwibloggs in July 2015 and has been a contributor since, Josh Salmon an Australian correspondent of the blog who has been part of the team since January 2015 and Robyn Gallagher from New Zealand who joined the blog in May 2014 and currently serves as an Executive Editor. She primarily writes for the site, edits the work of other contributors, trains new members and is actively involved in discussions such as the future direction of the blog. In the future they will be referred by their first names.

The interviews were conducted after the data collection of public comments and content analysis. I presented my findings briefly to them that political comments existed on their blog and asked

them what they thought was motivating users to leave such comments. The interviewees were well-aware of this fact and named various reasons as a potential motivating factor.

According to Josh the users might be further encouraged to actively participate in a political debate on a blog if they come from countries with oppressive regimes where they can not exercise the freedom of speech. "Often in their home countries if they are known to be vocal about political beliefs then it could cause them problems. When it's done in an online forum, there's a sense of anonymousness." Another interviewee Robyn thought that users came to the blog with strictly pre-existing opinions. This claim once again proves that Wiwibloggs can be seen as a third space, providing anonymity and freedom of speech because of its non-institutionalized nature. Everyday political talk is encouraged within cultural participation.

"A lot of it comes from their pre-existing political beliefs. For example, if we run a story on Russia withdrawing from Eurovision, someone who is already anti-Russian might make a comment attacking Russia/supporting Ukraine. Or vice versa." The third respondent Edd went as far as saying that some people might just "want to cause controversy for attention." While reasons behind people's motivation may vary between the ones from oppressive regimes to others seeking attention, the fact is unchanged that people are using the platform for sharing their political beliefs. "Motivation behind political comments on our site stems from actually having a platform to exercise their thoughts" adds Josh.

My next question was asking the bloggers if they could name any news articles recent or old which had sparked a political debate. It is interesting to see how much their answers matched with my previous findings during the March 2017, when I spotted a dispute between Ukraine and Russia. "The big one was Russia withdrawing from Eurovision. Pretty much every story we ran on the saga was followed by comments on the politics" said Robyn. "Large political debates usually come from any post about countries currently engaged in conflict - so at the moment anything about Armenia and Azerbaijan, or Russia and Ukraine. Most certainly the comments section of Julia Samoylova being banned by Ukraine from entering the country caused controversy" added Josh. The third respondent, Edd, had similar sentiments to share. "Any article about Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, Russia or Kosovo always seems to attract hateful

comments from nationals." As we can see, countries which are currently engaged in conflict are usually the ones which attract greater number of political comments on the music blog. One of my secondary questions of this research — whether political events which take place offline affect discussions online — are answered by this observation of the blog's journalists.

When asked about the nature of comments, attitudes of the authors and the language used by the interviewees unanimously state that majority of comments are non-constructive and insulting. "I find most of the comments generally childish and insulting. There's hardly ever anything constructive. It's usually fuelled by hate, malice and lack of education. It's always really petty and doesn't open the gate for an educated debate" said Josh. Edd had a similar opinion. "They are very often insulting, non-constructive, rude, short comments." Robyn, as a moderator of the comments section had deeper insights to share. "As a moderator of the comments, I try to be on the lookout for abusive comments that overstep the mark. We have filters that block any comments with swear words - and those often end up being the most intense political comments anyway." Nonetheless, she shared that there are times when she finds some debates interesting. "Other times some interesting political debate happens and it's always interesting to read perspectives of people from different countries and cultures." As we can see all the respondents are reporting that most of the political comments are not constructive, are insulting and often directed to individuals. There is an excess use of foul language as well.

Such description of a debate partially answered my following question. Nevertheless I wanted to know if they had observed a situation when people who were debating were open to come to a consensus. The answers were unanimously negative to this question as well, with few exceptions. Edd thought that "The vast majority of people seem to have an opinion and fight viciously for that, ignoring other sides of the argument." Observations of Josh were similar "I think most people are generally expressing their own opinion. Of course we have readers that do so on a regular basis, but most will just air out their anger and move on."

It is a "typical verbal behaviour" in online discussion platforms for verbal conflicts to rapidly escalate, which can then swiftly turn into "exchanges of personal insults known as 'flamewars' and the deliberately disruptive behaviour known as 'trolling' (Hopkinson 2014, p.66). In this aspect, the political comments on Wiwibloggs.com demonstrated that when people act antagonistically, their sense of anger is heightened and they indeed act and talk in ways which most people avoid in real life interactions. It is previously mentioned that the antagonistic individual sees "the Other" as the enemy and a threat to his or her very own existence. When this perspective is accompanied with anonymity and coming together with people who the individual does not encounter in his or her offline environments, the antagonistic verbal action is not only supported by the features of online discussion platforms but also flamed by it.

It was only Robyn who expressed different opinion saying there were exceptions when people were willing to hear each other. "A lot of it is just own opinions. Sometimes people who have never posted anything to the site before will suddenly post a really long comment about a political issue. It's obviously something that's inspired them. But at the same time, there has also been constructive debate between people, actual conversation and an interest in the other person's perspective. Everyone seems stuck in their beliefs, but there is at least a willingness to hear what the other person has to say."

Both Mouffe (2005) and Schmitt (2007) agree that political action and identities are drawn upon the distinction of "we/they". However, their ideas on how the we/they distinction can be formulated are rather different. Schmitt argues that the distinction of "they" or "the Other" should be hostile, therefore he defends that the root of political contention is and must be antagonistic. On the other hand, although she agrees upon the we/they distinction, Mouffe argues that "they" or "the Other" should not be seen as the enemy or threat but as the adversary. She calls this approach to the political as agonism (see 4.4.). In this perspective, it is possible to say that the analysis of the comments and the interviews with the journalists are clear indicators that the debates on the blog are mostly antagonistic, yet from what Robyn emphasizes there are also participants who engage in agonistic behavior and verbal agonism even though their percentage

is fairly low. As Robyn points out, the political discussion usually revolves around stubbornness and intolerance since when it comes to changing pre-set ideas on certain political issues, most of them stick with their old conceptions. But on the bright side, even though when people are unwilling to change their minds, some of them are willing to hear others' perspectives and experiences. In this vein, participants who are willing to give attention to other participants from variety of views do not distinguish "they" or "the Other" as the enemy or the threat. They are aware of the pluralistic nature of the political and are willing to engage in agonistic action even though they might not agree with other views. This claim is based on the answers provided by one of the bloggers and are not supported by the data collected by the researcher.

Since I was not able to interview the users who were leaving political comments on the blog I asked the question to the editors wondering if they were getting engaged in these conversations. "I steer clear from these debates until people get personal and then I have to intervene by removing such comments. I am not from a country that is currently engaged in conflict. I'm happy to act like Switzerland in all of this and just not get involved" said Josh. Robyn also had a similar attitude towards engaging in a political debates on the blog. "I try to stay out of it as a wiwi editor, but just personally I'm less interested in political debate - or at least not on a Eurovision blog. If I do get involved, it might be to step in and help keep the tone nicer, to prevent things from getting too heated." I conclude that the blog editors try to abstain from debating on the blog, rather they are moderating the section that it does not get hateful comments. It is an interesting reference that they associate themselves to Switzerland as a symbol of neutralization.

To the question concerning that comments left under the news articles and if they were educational in some ways, the journalists answered that despite all those insulting and offensive comments they have to read, they still find some comments educational. Especially the journalists from Australia and New Zealand pointed out how much they learned about various European matters which are not widely reported by the media. Josh said "I have learned that we clearly have readers from all walks of life. It's opened my eyes to some of the political issues

present in countries outside of the western world." Robyn's stance was similar in this regard "It has taught me a lot about European politics. Personally, coming from New Zealand, there's a lot of European political news that is only briefly reported here. I know so much about the Armenia-Azerbaijan situation and the often uneasy relationships between Russia and former Soviet states."

Additionally the bloggers expressed their opinions on the feature that the blog does not require readers to authorize and people can comment anonymously. They recognize the benefits of such people from conservative countries or countries from oppressive governments being able to express their opinions freely and engage in debates. This comes with a cost that anonymity makes people less accountable of what they post online. Josh said that it gives people "ability to sit behind a keyboard and say whatever they want." Robyn also shared her viewpoint on this particular aspect. "My thinking is that some Eurovision fans from more conservative countries may feel uncomfortable or unsafe posting under their own name on a site that is openly supportive of LGBT culture. So people have the option of using a pseudonym. But the flipside is that this can mean commenters feel less accountable than they would if they were posting under their own name."

6.3 Comments from the Archive of the Blog

My motivation to further continue data collection on the blog had multiple reasons. First of all, since I had already proved that political comments could be found on the blog, thus I had answered one of my main research questions, I intended to investigate if such political debate had taken place on the blog in the earlier years. By this I could strengthen my eventual claim that political discussions in fact take place on the blog fairly regularly and it was not a one-off case. Additionally, I could support my intention from the methodological point of view. Kozinets (2010) suggest that a netnographer access the archive of the online community. "Collecting and analysing these archival data is an excellent supplement to cultural participation. These can be

used analogously to the way that archival and historical data are used in ethnographies to extend and deepen the knowledge of the cultural context" (p. 104).

Fortunately it is fairly easy to access the articles from the archive. The oldest ones I could access dated back to as far as 2009. Since the amount of stories and comments posted on the blog in the history of its existence are numerous I used politics-related keywords to see if they would give any results.The keywords were chosen based on the answers of the bloggers obtained through the interviews. They had clearly indicated in their responses that news stories involving Armenia and Azerbaijan previously had generated political debates on the blog. Looking up the comments sections under the news stories about these two countries made it evident that 2017 was not the only year when blog users discussed political events in comment threads and often discussed issues unrelated to music — such as economics, GDP, oil prices and human rights — which are identified as political topics in the scope of how everyday political talk is identified in this thesis.

Azerbaijan, which joined the ESC in 2008, won the contest three years after its debut. Years after the victory it is still discussed that money may have played a great role in that success. Azerbaijan, a geographically predominantly Asian country was eager to promote itself in Europe. A blog user wrote *"They are simply using the Eurovision to showcase their country, and will do so by any means necessary. As corrupt as FIFA and Qatar."*

It is debatable whether Azerbaijan actually bought votes from other participating countries. It has only been confirmed that there was a failed attempt in 2013. (Plunkett, 2014, Guardian)

Investigating whether the voting was actually rigged is not the aim of this research, but analyzing the opinions of people shared on the blog is. That shows that certain people are suspicious about the win and the following success of Azerbaijan.

In 2015 the Azerbaijani jury members were accused of voting in a way which went against Eurovision rules. Fans were not late to react to that news either, one of them saying "*My only*

wish for Azerbaijan is to be kicked out of the contest, for cheating, bribing for votes, etc." and "*Cheaterbaijan should be thrown out unceremoniously. Corrupt to the core.*" As a response, one user intervened with a comment referring to the country's economic power. "*Azerbaijan is a strong and rich country! Get it. Don't compare it with Montenegro. Of course EBU will not withdraw the Land of Fire*." Others in the discussion were also skeptical of banning Azerbaijan over the current allegations. "*But of course, EBU wouldn't want to drop them that easily. We know how rich Azerbaijan is, right?*" and "*How much of their GDP do you guys think Azerbaijan wastes on Eurovision? I'd say about 30%, bribing all those people and buying all those votes can't come cheap.*"

The country's economic power and prosperity was once again referred in a sarcastic comment of a disappointed user who thought the quality of entries from Azerbaijan was gradually decreasing "*I wonder if the drop in oil price will affect their performance in Eurovision. They are already showing signs of it.*"

Many users would not necessarily be sympathetic towards an oil-rich country and would put out other issues under a spotlight such as human rights and freedom of speech. It is interesting to analyze these comments through different nations' cultures as well. The attitudes towards human rights and freedom of speech can vary between Europe's easternmost country - Azerbaijan - and those of Western European ones. We can see that in these cases social media can magnify the cultural differences. "Online discussion of public affairs can connect citizens sharing similar motivations but may also reproduce and magnify cultural disparities." (Papacharissi 2009, p.235).

I argue that these examples found on the blog show how politics finds its way on the non-political blog and turns a music news story into a debate backed with facts which would suit a political portal.

"*Your Azerbaijan is a strong and rich country – that is if by Azerbaijan you mean Baku. Because, according to economic statistics, people outside of Baku live like nomadic people did in*

the 19th century. And if your definition of rich and strong only encompasses oil money and buying military supplies then yes, Azerbaijan is very rich, but by my definition, Azerbaijan is a very poor country – no stable infrastructure, no freedom of press or speech, poor healthcare, a police state – where anyone and everyone who speaks out against the government is arrested. Azerbaijan should have been excluded from the contest 6 years ago when they decided to interrogate their own people for voting for the Armenian song."

What the author of the last comment was referring to is information that Azerbaijan's National Security Ministry questioned its citizens who were found to have voted for an Armenian entry in 2009. (Yevgrashina, 2009. Reuters)

In one of the articles on Wiwibloggs.com an author included a sentence which was not factually true and users tried to point it out. A news item about music turned into a history class educating the author. "For the Armenian take on the conflict in the region, listen to Sirusho's latest single or "Genealogy's" Eurovision entry" wrote the author. (*see appendix B, article 1*) *"This part has to be corrected. The Armenian genocide has nothing to do with Azerbaijan or with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. You've tried to keep "the balance" there, but it leads to a huge misunderstanding*" replied one user, and then another added *"The armenian genocide was not made by Azerbaijani but Ottoman Turks. The fact that Azerbaijani are brothers with Turks does not mean that Azerbaijan is to get blamed for this. Other than this, Armenia is in a war conflict state with Azerbaijan for decades now."*

There were people who did not take any side in the conflict and genuinely expressed their sorrow over lost souls "*It's so sad to know those innocent people including babies lost their lives in such a tragic way not so long ago. It doesn't matter if they were Azeris or Armenians, every single life matters. I'm wishing for peace in the Caucasus."*

The song contest has encouraged its audiences to voice their differences and by doing so, has exposed intra-European wounds that are often overlooked by other Europeans living further

afield. It may be just a matter of time before Scotland sends their own contestant to Eurovision but in the Caucasus the ongoing independence debate a continent away in the British Isles will not be given much coverage until that day. Likewise, the Azeri-Armenian conflict, so familiar to those living in that corner of Europe, receives little attention in Western Europe. This way, ESC and the blogs associated with it act as a melting pot of histories and ideologies. If they are approached with awareness, they can even serve an educational purpose which is also noted by the bloggers. Overall, since the blog provides a platform for discussion it can be considered as a contributor to democracy in general. According to Graham et.al. (2015, p.649) discussion is a vital component of democracy.

Although there were participants who advocated for the separation of the ESC from politics and that political participation should not be part of Wiwibloggs, the overall analysis of the comments proved that popular culture and politics is indeed intertwined and cannot be seen and considered separately as Graham and Harju (2011) discussed (see 4.3.) The analysis of the comments showed that to understand the ESC and its place in popular culture, political discussions and arguments have to be kept in mind because "popular culture becomes a political activity through its uses" (Graham & Hajru 2011, p.21). In the case of Wiwibloggs, participants used Eurovision to reflect their opinions on different countries based on their perception accumulated through past and present political events and attitudes of them.

As mentioned previously, Wiwibloggs is a third space which brings together people from all over the world to discuss issues on Eurovision. Additionally the comment function of the blog lets people stay anonymous at all times. These two features have important implications on how everyday political talk occurs on the blog. First of all, online communication differs in "physical proximity" when compared to face-to-face communication. Participants do not see each other when they are only talking through written narrative such as comments. Additionally, as a feature provided by some blogs -such as Wiwibloggs- anonymity is made possible. Users do not use their real names- which can be done if the participant is willing but that is rarely the case- and their real identities are not known to others they interact with in the online sphere. On some

websites, there is even no need to create an account to participate in discussions, which is exactly how people use the commenting feature on Wiwibloggs.com (Hopkinson 2014, p. 66). In this perspective, Hopkinson (2014) argues that these features might have "dehumanizing effect" on online communication. He furthermore argues that when people engage in antagonistic behaviours during political participation in online spheres, "they may come to view their opponents not as real human beings but as mere characters in a highly competitive game". The features of anonymity and distant geographical proximity also have links with "decreased social inhibition" (p.66). According to Hardaker (2010) such features "can […] foster a sense of impunity, loss of self-awareness, and a likelihood of acting upon normally inhibited impulses" (quoted in Hopkinson, p. 66). Therefore, online discussion platforms when considered as a genre, provides a suitable setting in which "intensely antagonistic behaviour" can easily "flourish" since some participants tend to feel "licensed to behave towards their opponents with a degree of heightened aggression that they would generally avoid in" face-to-face communication.

In conclusion, the data presented in this chapter answers all four main and secondary research questions of the thesis. First, it brings political comments collected in March 2017, supported by the claim of the bloggers that they too have come across political debates on the blog. This claim is even further backed by the data from the archive which strengthens the finding that not only political comments exist on the blog but they are regularly finding the way on Wiwibloggs.com

The section also explains the limitation of the study and acknowledges that political comments do not occur on the blog out of blue, rather there is a preceding action - sharing a news article by the blog. Thus most of comments are reactions to the news.

Comments on the topic of Russia and Ukraine, as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan are a clear demonstration that offline events, such as wars and conflicts between nations, can affect the content on online platforms as well. The journalists also emphasized that most of the political comments are posted on the blog under the news concerning the countries currently in conflict.

Lastly, the there are specific comments quoted in this section which are demonstrating the language and nature of these comments. The answers from the interviewees, saying that they rarely observe constructive conversations of people with opposing opinions, show that a majority of political comments on the blog are antagonistic, while agonistic ones are detected occasionally.

7. Concluding Remarks

This research aimed to understand everyday political talk that emerges in non-institutionalized and non-political online public spheres which are identified as third spaces in the scope of this study. The main research question, *"How does political talk occur on Wiwibloggs.com as a non-conventional political communicative space?"* is directed to understand how everyday cultural participation of ordinary citizens in non-conventional political communicative spaces - which are not mainly concerned with politics - facilitate everyday political talk. After the study identified Wiwibloggs.com as a third space and analyzed the process of everyday political talk taking place, secondary research questions were directed to have an in-depth understanding about the nature of everyday political talk in third spaces.

To guide the overall analysis of empirical data, the research has utilized several theoretical concepts. One of the most important concepts utilized in this study is the concept of third space. When briefly explained, the study argued that third spaces are online spaces that are not established for political purposes- in that sense they are non-political in nature- in which everyday political talk emerges. Moving on to the next concept the study utilizes, is everyday political talk which includes all forms of informal talk that emerge in conversations that do not have political orientation and are not directed towards decision makers. The last but not the least, concepts of antagonism and agonism are employed for the data analysis. Based on Carl Schmitt's ideas, the concept of antagonism argued in this study emphasizes a friend-enemy distinction between groups that hold different political views. Therefore, as Schmitt suggests, political enemies must be approached as threats to be eliminated if a political group wants to meet its political ends. On the other hand, the concept of agonism that is argued in this study is created by Chantal Mouffe. Although Mouffe also recognizes that political action is based on antagonistic distinctions, she argues that a more pluralistic and agonistic way of political action is possible. In this perspective, rather than the friend-enemy distinction, she suggests a new model of friend-adversary relation. In this model, groups of different political views are not seen as

enemies to be eliminated but rather as adversaries with whom reconciliation and cooperation should be established.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that this study has revealed that while the majority of comments on the blog are related to music, there are ones which bear political elements. This is observed especially under the news stories concerning the countries which have historical conflicts or tense political relationship in modern times such as Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan etc. This observation is based on the content analysis of comments left on Wiwibloggs.com and further supported by the results of the interviews conducted with the bloggers. This observation leads to the claim that political events offline - such as wars, human rights violations and suppression of freedom of speech - have a noticeable effect on the online comments.

From the comments section it can be summarized that there is a distinguished group of people who is against the politicizing of the contest. Drawing lines between a cultural event and politics of participant countries. While another group thinks politics are above the music contest and it is impossible to completely set them aside. The accompanying political narrative which the contest has is closely connected with the history of European nations and further encouraged by the competitive nature of the event.

Based on the theoretical and empirical analysis, I could identify Wiwibloggs.com as a third space for several reasons;

1. Wiwibloggs is a non-conventional online cultural sphere, "a place beyond home" which allows interaction and distribution of information, thus forming an alternative space for people to informally communicate with each other.

2. Wiwibloggs is a "non-political" and "non-geographical", online discussion space in which everyday political talk "pops up" in relation to Eurovision as a popular culture event.

3. Wiwibloggs is a space which is not initiated or controlled by governments or political parties, therefore, its primary function is not political participation but rather cultural.

Additionally, I have defined what everyday political talk is in theoretical terms and investigated how it occurs in Wiwibloggs.com. What the thesis tells us is;

1. Everyday political talk differs from political communication that is directed towards governments, states or parties. They are not planned or organized. Instead, they are informal, unintentional, unstructured and can be found scattered across a third space.

2. Everyday political talk cannot be considered separately from popular culture because popular culture is indeed part of politics in relation to its utilization and how it operates in all walks of life.

3. Everyday political talk does not have to be rational, profound and objective as if directed to political decision makers.

4. The empirical analysis has showed that everyday political talk and political arguments are usually based on subjectivity of the participants rooted in their experiences, cultural backgrounds and how they perceive the world.

5. Everyday political talk in third spaces contains emotions such as anger, sympathy, sadness, disgust, etc.

6. Lastly, everyday political talk can both bring people together based on common sentiments and ideas but also separate them radically.

In short, as the research showed, a majority of the users came to the blog with pre-existing opinions and were unlikely to change them. The journalists, who are also the moderators of the comments section, confirmed that while for many users the platform was a place to air out their anger, they also noted the willingness of some to hear contrasting opinions. These highly contested debates, which may sometimes seem irrational, can also be educational at the same time. During the process users are exploring their own viewpoints. They hear the opinions of their opponents and as a whole the process is beneficial to democracy, as informal political talk is the fundament of the collective decision-making. (Kim & Kim. 2008)

The investigation of the everyday political talk that occurs on Wiwibloggs.com could be identified agonistic and antagonistic. The research has demonstrated the following conclusions;

1. There were both examples of agonistic and antagonistic political talk on the blog. However, the amount of antagonistic comments showed that the political nature of the everyday talk is leaning towards antagonistic.

2. Even though the percentage of agonistic talk is fairly lower compared to the antagonistic, there still were participants who did not chose to blame and flame other participants because of their opposing views and listened to their opinions.

3. The antagonistic everyday political talk on Wiwibloggs.com is mainly based on cultural and historical conceptions of certain countries. True or not, the perspectives of some participants made them see "they" or "the Other" as an enemy. There were instances that some participants thought that some countries should be banned from the ESC based on their subjective judgements.

4. Everyday political talk that occurs on Wiwibloggs.com was also facilitated by the online space itself. As a third space, Wiwibloggs.com grants participants the possibility to comment anonymously on the platform at all times. Additionally, participants are aware that they are communicating with people who do not know their identities and who they do not interact with offline. Therefore, these features flourished the antagonistic potential of everyday political talk which was characterized by violence, anger and foul language.

5. The researcher who closely followed the development of the events in the comments section did not observe that the blog, identified as a third space, facilitated the shift from antagonism to agonism, or the other way around. The majority of readers joined the discussions with a pre-existing opinions and kept them until the end. The claim is supported both by the data and the interview results.

As mentioned in the text numerous political comments have been detected on Wiwibloggs.com and it has also been noted that these comments were observed under the articles which to some extend bore political elements. For the future research I propose a long-term netnographic

research which is not limited in time and its primary goal is to to detect political comments which are left under the news articles containing no political sentiments, Additionally a netnographic research with a lengthier time frame could make it possible to observe certain behavior of active readers. Ideally, a future research would make it possible to interview the regular users of the blog and find out more about what place the blog has in their lives, as well as what their experience is like on the online communicative space surrounded by a number of anonymous people.

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9. Appendices

Appendix A. **Sources from Wiwibloggs.com about Russia's participation in Eurovision in 2017**

1. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 12.
   http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/03/12/russias-yulia-samoilova-becomes-second-singer-wheelchair-compete-eurovision/180422/
2. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 14
   http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/03/14/ukraines-security-forces-investigate-russias-julia-samoilova-crimean-performance/180820/
3. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 20
   http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/03/20/not-come-ukraines-security-services-prepared-paperwork-julia-samoylovas-potential-ban/181808/
4. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 22
   http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/03/22/ukraine-bans-russias-eurovision-2017-singer-yulia-samoylova-entering-country/182149/
5. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 23
   http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/03/23/russias-julia-samoylova-speaks-about-ukraines-ban-as-network-tees-her-up-for-eurovision-2018/182246/
6. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 23
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7. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 27
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8. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 29
   http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/03/29/ebu-chief-ingrid-deltenre-threatens-ukraine-exclusion-eurovision/183520/
9. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, March 31
   http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/03/31/ebus-full-letter-ukraines-prime-minister-confirms-threat-exclusion-eurovision/183923/
10. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, April 1
    http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/04/01/were-defending-ukrainian-legislation-vice-prime-minister-says-russia-welcome-at-eurovision-but-julia-samoylova-is-not/184494/
11. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, April 13
    http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/04/13/russias-channel-one-will-not-broadcast-eurovision-as-ebu-unable-to-confirm-julia-samoylovas-participation/186161/

12. Wiwibloggs.com, 2017, April 14
    http://wiwibloggs.com/2017/04/14/timeline-russia-ukraine-spat-julia-samoylova-eurovision-2017/183762/

Appendix B. **An article from the archive of Wiwibloggs.com**

1. Wiwibloggs.com, 2015, May 27

http://wiwibloggs.com/2015/05/27/better-late-than-never-five-tracks-you-may-have-missed/96836/